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HEALEY: A ROMANCE

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H E A L E Y

A ROMANCE

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL

*' Hope nothing, if I thus may speak
To thee, a woman, and thence weak.
Hope nothing, I repeat.*

*Farewell all wishes, all debate,
All prayer for this cause, or for that I
Weep, if that aid thee, but depend
Upon no help of outward friend ;
Espouse thy doom at once, and cleave
To fortitude without reprieve.'*

—WORDSWORTH

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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HEALEY: A ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

'Harken, oh harken ! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved.
Our voices seek along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved !'

—*A Drama of Exile.*

TIGHTRED EARNSHAW sat alone one evening in the early September. He was wondering what Katharine would do if Wilfrid remained away much longer without sign. The strike at the mill was over ; the Cornish girls had withdrawn, and then the Lancashire hands returned to work. That was all right, and if only the master were at home, an arrangement might soon be made with the colliers also.

He then turned towards the table, and, still thinking of business, opened a bundle of papers which he was to look over. They had been put into his hands by Katharine, with the words, 'I don't know whether they are all there, for they were tumbled into a drawer in my davenport, but they are all dated. You must tell me to-morrow if any are missing. I want to know the prices from May to September in——.' She named several successive years.

He turned to his task, and presently opened a paper similar to all the others in appearance. He spread it open, but it had neither dates nor figures. It was a large sheet of blue paper, covered on two sides with a compact and legible handwriting. Naturally he glanced at it; the words arrested his attention; they astonished him, and he read on.

"The old days," said she, "seem to be here again, do not they?"

'For an instant I was cheated, and said,

"Yes, indeed;" but after I had spoken, something seemed to whisper to my heart, "No, they never will return again;" and aloud I said, "What was it I said just now? The old days? oh, never, never more!"

'My friend sighed. "Alas! I fear not!" she acquiesced. "We are older now, and sadder; and when part of what made the old days is gone, how can we live them over again?"

"True," I replied; "we will not strive after them. They are dead and buried. Let us do the best we can with these new ones. If we fill them with earnest, steady, holy work, they will not seem so like a hollow echo of what we rejoiced in *then*."

'Then, with all the sun veiled from our eyes, and all the light gone from our faces, we walked on, arm in arm as before; nature, the irrevocable, around us; the water plashing in our ears, and the sky blue and bright above us. All was as it had been, but we knew that

when we reached a certain house, our destination, there would meet us merely a great void, which refused to be filled up ; and despite our calm words and resolute promises, we felt the truth, and could not meet each others' eyes. We approached the house ; as we drew nigh our courage failed ; we could not enter.

“The sun is still high,” we said ; “we will not go in yet ; let us stroll over the hill and upon the moors, and return when dark comes on.”

‘We turned aside from the gates without demur, and went our way up the winding road, and presently came to a farm placed high upon a hill. That we passed. It was the end of June ; the haymakers in the sloping field were merrily singing and calling one to another, and tossing up the fragrant grass. Evening scents began to steal in the air ; evening sounds to pervade space. The sun was lower than we had supposed. He was already yellowing, and each figure stood out soft, yet clear, and “dark against day’s golden

death." But as for us, we passed on in silence. We stole by without saluting the haymakers, for their merriment jarred upon our sadness. We passed down the hill, and came to a narrow lane ; a stream ran through it, and disappeared under an arched tunnel. High banks rose around it. The sun was hidden by one of them, and the air was chill.

" "This is like the Valley of the Shadow of Death," said my companion.

" "Perhaps, to some," I answered, "and those steep toilsome steps, up which we must climb to reach the higher road, are the hard entrance into eternity which such must dree. But" (and here we emerged upon a mountain road) "cross the road, and look down that gentle descent into a shaded but most beautiful valley. That, since I have known it, has always symbolized the Valley of the Shadow of Death to me."

'The sun was in view again, and we pursued our way up the road. The moors lay around us, vast and broad. From the

sky a star or two began to twinkle. As we ascended the air became clearer — the hills more majestic — the silence more solemn and imposing.

‘The stars shone out brighter; and finally, as we reached the highest ridge, where the road ceased to ascend, and began to slope to the other side, we looked around, and below us we saw night already falling in either valley. We were high: we were elevated above the villages and farm-houses. We looked down upon reservoirs and moorland tarns.’ Earth’s lights were quenched or dim in the dusk and mist of descending night, while we could look in awed and wondering worship at the calm blue heavens, and at the mystic silver crescent and steadfast points of light, whose radiance was shed upon us. And yet we mourned. We could not speak to each other, but stood apart in silence.

‘A breeze rose, and like a wailing whisper slipped over our heads. It was the spirit of

those past days which we should never know any more. A sadness as of death possessed us. Then floated through my mind words which I had read "long since, and lost awhile;" but now they overcame me—

'We are but orphan spirits left in Eden
A time ago ;
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so ;
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do—
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole world through.

'Harken ! oh, harken ! ye shall harken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you dripping—coldly, purely—
Of spirit's tears !'

'Then we sighed, and shivered, and said,
"Let us now descend and go home."

'We took our way back again, and as we went clouds gathered, and the wind rose high, while we hurried along to be out of the storm.

'When we went into the house, our friends were there, save only him. His voice—was

silent; his form was wanting—ah! where was he?

‘Perhaps he would come later? No. Tomorrow, or the next day? Not so. In a month, a year, say in several years? Ah, no! Then when? Never. He is gone, and we shall see him no more—we who loved him—he who loved us. Is he happy, away from us, or is his heart possessed by just such a void as ours? We do not know. We cannot tell if he be at all. We may question, we may pray, we may torment our souls day and night, but no one will reply. This is what makes us so sad.—“K. H.”’

Those initials suddenly taught Ughtred what he had been doing. He had been reading a paper of Miss Healey’s, never meant for his eye, acquainting himself with revelations and memories intended for the writer’s sight alone.

For a few moments he hardly knew what to do. There was pain, there was pleasure

in the knowledge he had just proved. He felt as if he had noiselessly entered a crypt; he also felt a curiosity of the most purely mundane description.

‘Who is he—*he*? Whom will she never see again? Whom does she mourn so sadly? I wish I had never seen the paper! To-morrow I shall have to tell her I have read it— How *am* I to do that? But of course she must know. Can it be true that the most strong-minded of women are devoid of a proper attention to the sorting of their papers—are ungifted with the spirit of pigeon-holes, and let business papers and sentimental reveries repose side by side, sublimely careless of what irreverent eyes may light upon them? Not, I am sure, that I have read it irreverently, but how is she to know that? I wish—Hang it! I do wish I had never seen the thing!’

Katharine Healey, too, sat lonely that

evening, smiling now and then an ungenial smile at her own ungenial reflections. Wilfrid had been away rather more than a month, and she had heard not the faintest tidings of him. Now and then something seemed to whisper to her, 'Louis Kay knows where he is.' Once again she had asked him; once again he had tranquilly denied any knowledge of Wilfrid's whereabouts, seeming amused that she should ask him so often about a thing of which he had once denied all knowledge.

'If I were to marry Louis,' she was thinking to-night, 'would he still hide things away from me; still have secrets that he did not confide?

'Oh, if I only knew any one who was perfectly honest, any one who would rather I knew all about him, however evil, than keep me in ignorance! Some one who liked me to know him as he was——*He*, I am saying, but there is no such man in the world.

They are all half-hearted. Those who are perfectly candid are only those who have nothing to conceal but folly, which will out whether they choose or no.

‘All these years I have never reproached him, never disobeyed him, never thwarted him. It is not fair—it is not indeed! His workmen can lay down their tools and stand aside while they bargain for better terms, and he has to give in to them at last. Why should not I do the same? Fool, to ask such a question! I’m lonely enough now, but *then* — what should I be then? He would never cast a second thought after me unless something went wrong that I was in the habit of smoothing over for him. It is very hard——’

The hall bell rang. Katharine waited, but her sitting-room was distant, and she heard nothing. No one came to her; and her heart, which had fluttered eagerly for a few moments, soon beat regularly again.

She passed the rest of the evening in a continuation of her former reflections ; and before going to bed paid her usual visit to Wilfrid's domain, the smoking - room, just to glance round at the unfamiliar order and neatness of the

‘ Empty room,
And idle door that missed the master's step.’

A light was burning there, which quenched that of the candle she held. Seated in his own peculiar chair, tranquilly smoking a cigar, was Wilfrid, looking as if he had never been absent from his place.

‘ *Wilfrid!*’ she cried, in profound and mortified astonishment, ‘ when did you come ?’

‘ Hours ago. You don't seem very glad to see me.’

‘ You might at least have sent to tell me you were here, if you would not be at the trouble of coming to see me yourself,’ said she, coldly, but with a most aching heart.

‘ What! Mayn't I come into my own house

in any manner I choose, without a scolding ?
My dear girl, drop that ; I won't have it.'

'It cannot matter to you whether I am pleased or not to see you,' said she, turning away to leave the room ; but though she stepped proudly her eyes were almost blinded with tears. Had he uttered but one soft word, he had been welcomed as prodigals usually are ; but since he did not care, she would go. There was the whole long night before her—plenty of time in which to prove the bitterness of her grief and humiliation.

She had moved but slowly in her pain ; and when he put his arm round her waist, her pride was not strong enough to make her remove it and pass on ; besides, she had a candlestick in her right hand.

'A precious welcome home I get !' he said.
'Give me that candle, and don't try on Lady Macbeth airs, Kate. I assure you, you would never make your fortune on the stage——'

A pause.

‘If I wait long enough, Kate, will you give me a kiss’ (kissing her as he spoke), ‘and tell me what you have been doing while I’ve been away? I rather expect to hear that I am bankrupt. Relieve my anxiety, please.’

‘Oh, Wilfrid,’ said she, between laughing and crying, ‘can you humbug other people as easily as you can me, I wonder?’

The result of the concession was, that Miss Healey, instead of retiring to rest in dudgeon, sat with her brother until past midnight, telling him of many things—of cotton, coals, and strikes; of her own and Ughtred’s combined measures; of Mrs. Kay, and of Mr. Gamaliel, whom she described for his benefit in her dry, sardonic way.

‘Who? What? Gamaliel?’ exclaimed Wilfrid, with a startled look. ‘Gamaliel!’ he repeated to himself, passing his hand over his eyes, and he became suddenly silent.



CHAPTER II.

‘A fault confessed is half redressed.’



THE day after Wilfrid's return he went to Healey, saw Earnshaw, was pleased to commend the measures he had taken, and was, upon the whole, gracious and complacent, if a little blustering.

The next morning Katharine rode up, and almost her first question was for the list she had desired Ughtred to make.

‘It is here,’ said he, giving her the list; and, withholding that other paper, he added, after a pause, ‘This, I think, had got slipped

in with the others.' He felt himself redden under her gaze, but went on, 'I had read several words before I knew what I was doing, and then — it was quite unpardonable——'

'You finished it, I suppose?' said Katharine coolly.

'Yes,' he replied, looking straight at her. 'I can but apologize, and that I do most humbly, though I daresay you will hardly pardon me; indeed, I cannot expect that you should.'

'Suppose I look at this unlucky document,' said she, in a composed but rather constrained voice, as she took it, opened it, and glanced at it.

For a moment she too blushed painfully, and then said, with a contemptuous though rather unsteady laugh—

'You are too conscientious, Mr. Earnshaw. I could not imagine what you had got hold of. I am sorry if your mind has been dis-

turbed about this trash, and still more surprised that I have not destroyed it long ago. It refers to a young brother of mine who died some six years ago, when I was seventeen—an age at which both boys and girls imagine that there are griefs past the healing. Perhaps you will be good enough to tear it up, and toss it into the waste-paper basket.’ And she thréw it indifferently upon the desk.

‘Then you pardon my impertinence?’

‘Impertinence is much too imposing a word *ab* to use in relation to such nonsense. I hope it afforded you any amusement, I am sure. Were any of the other papers missing?’

‘No.’

‘You will have seen Mr. Healey?’

‘I did, yesterday.’

‘I am going away from home myself. My brother says I need a change.’ (Poor Katharine! she spoke with as much pride as if he had been the most considerate brother in the world.) ‘And as Mrs. and Mr. Kay

are going away from home, I am going with them. Now, I want you to write to me every week, Mr. Earnshaw. Mr. Healey never writes, except upon business matters, and after what has happened I cannot be easy to be away without hearing anything. You have been so kind hitherto—will you think this too much trouble?’

‘It will be no trouble, but a pleasure.’

‘I am so much obliged. Good-bye, then. We leave to-morrow. By the by—’ added Katharine, as if remembering something—‘Crier used to be attached to Sara Holden, your landlady’s daughter. Does he ever come there now, and do you think she returns his devotion?’

‘He never comes there. She has been away for more than a month, “seeing the world,” her mother says. I believe she absolutely dislikes him now, but I don’t think she always did, and I consider it a pity for both of them that they could not have been married.’

‘Ah! I don’t agree with you in the least. She is a sweet, modest, beautiful girl, a thousand times too good for him. Good-bye again.’

How unconsciously she spoke, not knowing that the day would come on which she would wish, with tears and sighs, that Sara and Crier *had* been married long ago.

They shook hands and parted. The sheet of blue paper never reached the waste-paper basket. It returned home with Ughtred Earnshaw, and found a place amongst his treasures.





CHAPTER III.

'If you look closely at the matter, it will be seen that whatever appears most vagrant and utterly purposeless, turns out in the end to have been impelled the most surely on a preordained and unswerving track.'—*Transformation*.



THE words which head this chapter are very true ones. How was Katharine Healey to know that a certain elfish-looking little girl, with a large expressive mouth, weird brown eyes, and two little pig-tails of brown hair tied with pink ribbons—a little girl who had all that summer run on the sands and danced along by the waves that washed the quiet beach of Pen-fynlas in Wales—how, I ask, was she to know that this little being was in any way connected with her fate? Yet it was so.

Little Phœbe Meredith ran down every day from her father's house, which overlooked the sea, and passed her time in contented dreams and elfish gambols, as lonely and as happy as any one in the world, till September came, and the very few visitors who had penetrated to that quiet spot took their departure. Penfynlas was empty.

'No one else will come, Thorgerd,' said Phœbe, clasping her step-sister's hand, and trying to make the staid steps of her elder keep pace with her own dancing gait.

'Very likely,' assented the sister, standing still and shading her eyes with her hand, to gaze over the expanse of waters, and be dazzled by the sunshine that lay upon them.

The little girl and the tall maiden were alike wrong. Fresh visitors did come to Penfynlas: no others than Katharine Healey, Mrs. Kay, and her son Louis.

The reasons for their coming to so quiet and secluded a spot were various. Two

impulses urged Louis to it: he was in love, and asked nothing better than to be near Katharine in the quietest place in the world, and he had a friend living near Penfynlas who offered him some shooting. Katharine was utterly indifferent as to where she went, and Mrs. Kay, wrapped up in her son and rather fond of Katharine, was ready to go wherever the others wished.

On the morning after their arrival Katharine betook herself to the beach alone. Louis had gone to see his friend, and Mrs. Kay was not disposed to go out. Katharine looked up and down the solitary shore, and saw only the one little figure, Phœbe Meredith, who walked at a sedate pace than usual by the sea, as near as possible to the retreating waves. It did not require much resolution on Phœbe's part to address the newcomer; she considered an aimless stranger to be her natural property, and entered into a conversation with Katharine

with little ceremony. She volunteered her society and companionship in the walk that Katharine proposed to take; and finding that she was not rebuffed, but that a hand was extended to her, and that a faint smile lighted a sad face at her prattle, she became very communicative, and soon put Katharine into possession of the chief facts of her life; that she was the daughter of the vicar of Penfynlas; that Thorgerd was her sister, but not her 'own very sister;' that mamma did not like Thorgerd, and Thorgerd did not like mamma; and that she, Phœbe, liked Thorgerd rather better than mamma. These things, with other details concerning village acquaintances and daily doings, did the garrulous little tongue pour into Katharine's amused ears. She was touched and pleased to find that anything so bright, so joyous, and so elfin-like, should seem rather attracted to her than otherwise; and she rambled about the pleasant beach all morning with

her little companion, returning about one o'clock to the place whence they had started.

Thorgerd was walking about the beach with a book ; she looked uneasily hither and thither, and her face brightened perceptibly when she saw Phœbe.

‘Where have you been, child?’ she asked, but not chidingly. ‘I have been looking for you for half an hour.’

Phœbe ran forward, and gave a detailed account of her morning’s adventure.

‘I hope I have not done wrong in taking her,’ said Katharine, pleased with the sweet and rather sad face of the elder sister. ‘She seemed not unwilling to go, and I was glad to have her for a companion.’

‘It is kind of you. I hope she has not been troublesome,’ said Thorgerd.

They conversed for some little time, and each moment Katharine liked better the open, charming face of this brown-haired, soft-voiced maiden. She was not beautiful,—sometimes

she was hardly even pretty,—but there was a harmony and fitness in her traits, and an untaught, unconstrained grace in her manner, which Katharine was conscious of lacking herself, and which was to her as refreshing as the breezes from the sea by which the girl dwelt.





CHAPTER IV.

'My heart is sair, I daurna tell ;
My heart is sair.'



KATHARINE'S acquaintance with the Merediths progressed. Their father and mother had called upon Mrs. Kay, who professed herself delighted with them ; but Katharine found the society of the sisters sufficient for her. A child is a wonderful revolutionist. The small being called Phoebe Meredith soon broke down the barriers of stiffness and formality. She spoke to the Kays or to Katharine whenever she saw them ; it would have been sinful to resist her gay 'How do you do ?' She had a confiding way

of slipping her hand into Katharine's that the latter could not resist ; and many were the strolls and drives taken together by the grave, somewhat saturnine woman, and the odd, unearthly-looking little girl.

In knowing Phœbe, she grew also to know better, and to like even more, Phœbe's sister. Louis, perhaps, was not so well pleased at finding Katharine so constantly in the society of the two Merediths. He had calculated upon being almost always with her when not out shooting, and he felt almost jealous of her new companions.

She was one morning sitting on the beach with Thorgerd : Phœbe was lying on the stones not far from them, turning over the leaves of a book, and Mrs. Kay was pacing about at some little distance, in conversation with the sharp-faced Mrs. Meredith, the stepmother, whom Katharine had quickly guessed to be the trouble of Thorgerd's life.

' Katharine,' said Louis, coming up to them.

‘Here is a letter for you. The post has just come in, at the timely hour of noon.’

Katharine looked eagerly to see if it were from Wilfrid, but no: it had the Hamerton post-mark, but the writing was Ughtred Earnshaw’s.

Her fingers trembled and her face flushed as she opened it. She assured herself silently that all was well; Earnshaw would have telegraphed if anything had gone wrong; but she had grown a coward of late, and could not altogether master her foolish fears. She did not know that both Louis and Thorgerd were watching her; he with distrust and vexation; she with a little wonder at the palpable tremor and disturbance of Katharine’s manner.

The letter, however, was very short, and assured her that all was well, and that Crier was just then away from Hamerton on a professional tour, combining preaching with sedition. Mr. Healey had been to the office. (Earnshaw did not mention that he had

grumbled bitterly at Katharine's absence, and sworn roundly at things in general upon the occasion.) He would write again next week, and he remained her 'Obedient servant, Ugh-tred Earnshaw.'

'Just what I wanted to know,' reflected Katharine, looking down at the short concise note, with its even lines and round, clear handwriting. 'Who would think,' she went on to herself, 'that this is from a man who knows my worst trouble, and who has helped me as I never thought I should need helping? When I was seventeen, I did not prophetically see myself receiving such letters as this. I hope Wilfred will not quarrel with Mr. Earnshaw. I can imagine, nay, I am sure, that though patient, gentle, and reasonable, yet that there are things that would rouse him in a minute, and if he *were* angry ——' she half smiled as she thought, 'I should not like to face him. I should be so sure that he was in the right to be angry.'

‘You have an interesting letter, Katharine?’ said Louis inquiringly.

She started, and looked up, to find his eyes bent upon her in an interested, questioning kind of way that she resented. Her letters were no concern of his—yet.

She answered, rather coldly, ‘I never have interesting letters as some people have. They are business, all business, and very dry.’

‘I hope all is right at Healey.’

‘Thank you, yes; quite right.’ With which she put the letter in her pocket, wishing she could put away the whole subject in the same expeditious manner. Then she and Thorgerd rose and walked towards Mrs. Kay and Mrs. Meredith; and Louis stood still, looking after them, till Phœbe’s voice arrested his attention, and he looked at her. She was sitting on the shingle, looking up at him, and she observed, with the utmost composure—

‘You are vexed that Miss Healey has got that letter.’

‘Indeed ! Why ?’

‘And you wish you could read it,’ pursued Phœbe.

He shook his head, and smiled ; but Phœbe nodded decisively two or three times without speaking.

Katharine wrote to Ughtred in a day or two, thanking him for his letter ; giving him her address, and asking him to write again.

‘Excuse me,’ she concluded, ‘if I remind you that you promised to give me your help in that matter as my *friend*, not my “obedient servant.” I am sure I need not say more.’

She had paused to consider before writing this, and had finally decided to do it. The idea of presumption or impertinence from Ughtred did not trouble her. She dismissed it without one misgiving, while she longed to have the comfort of knowing that he did consider himself her friend.

Katharine’s difficulties were increasing upon her. She could not keep owning that Louis

had behaved very well. Since they left home he had never uttered a word to her concerning what he knew she considered a very important subject. But she knew, too, that he had never for a moment lost sight of his intention. He had respected her entreaty for peace most scrupulously; but had he not said that if they both lived, she should love him as he loved her?

She did not believe that anything of the kind would ever happen, but she did feel it more than possible that she might some day be married to him. She could not see her way out of it. He had always been so kind to her. She liked him better than any one but Wilfrid, even if she did not entirely trust him. But her liking for him was not sufficient to take away any of the clearness from her eyes—any of the steadiness from her judgment.

In thinking of him she never felt confused, or partial, or shy. She knew that he must

have all or none—that he must be absolute possessor or settled enemy. There it was. She dared not make an enemy of him. Wilfrid's one vulnerable point, so far, had been his susceptibility to Louis Kay's influence.

'Oh,' thought Katharine, 'he knows me through and through. How he guessed all my troubles! And he knows that for Wilfrid I would do so much! But he is not generous. If he were, he would release me and still be my friend.'

She knew, though, that he would not do that. His was not the love that renounces. No doubt he would adore her—would, as he had said, think his life well spent in brightening hers; but he would reserve to himself the right to choose *how* it should be brightened. No doubt, nothing in his eyes was too good for her; no woman so beautiful as she was. He could do anything for her sake; he could attain to the utmost step of pure and manly

love—the utmost step but one ; he could not resign her.

She believed that Louis, despising as he did most of his fellow-worms, was truly attached to Wilfrid, and fond of his influence over him : she thought that with a brother's right in regard to him he might influence him still more strongly, and once or twice her heart throbbed as she thought that perhaps *her* sacrifice might move Wilfrid. If it made him love her a little more, was it not almost worth paying? If she were only required to die, or to annihilate herself in some way, as the price of Wilfrid's salvation, how clear and easy her path would have been ! But to live—to be paying the price all her days ! There was the rub.

There were times even now when she felt Louis' presence irksome ; now, when nothing but conventional politeness need prevent her from rising up and leaving him—ridding herself at once of what jarred on her. But if

she were his wife, thought Katharine, with a burning face and a restless movement of pain, she could not do that, for he would have the right to bid her remain; and was not he just the man to use such a right—lovingly perhaps, but mercilessly?

‘Oh, Wilfrid,’ she sighed within herself, ‘you ought to love me very much; you ought indeed.’

If she had only been able to trust Louis thoroughly, she believed she would almost have had pleasure in the sacrifice; but in him there always seemed to be something behind: he appeared to tell her all, and yet she ever felt as if something remained untold. It was in vain to tell herself that she had never detected him in any perversion of the truth; she had never heard of his saying one thing and doing another, or of the faintest whisper of double-dealing in connection with his name. She did not trust him; she knew that she did not.

Yet all the time she was trying to believe that she could not marry him, and endeavouring to stave off the evil day on which he should plainly ask her to do so—all the time she was nearly certain what her answer to his question would be.





CHAPTER V.

'Who nill bide the burden of distresse
Must not here think to live, for life is wretchednesse.'—SPENSER.

ONE day Louis put into Katharine's hands a letter from Wilfrid, taking, as he did so, a long, earnest look into her face. Scarcely heeding the look, except with a sweeter, happier smile than usual, Katharine opened the letter, with what a bounding heart! And with what blank, bitter disappointment she read it, comprehended it, folded it up! Rarely indeed did Wilfrid condescend to write letters, still more rarely to give advice, but he had on this occasion done both. After men-

tioning one or two business matters, he said—

‘I should not have written, Kate, if I had not wished to say something of importance to you; something I wish you to consider well.

‘You know that Kay is fond of you. Much slower eyes than yours must have seen that; and for my part I admire his taste. No one who knew you could preserve the opinion that *all* women are fools; though, my dear girl, I frankly tell you that you are a startling exception to the rule. But to return to my point. He has told me that he loves you—whatever that may mean; and he asked me if I objected to his proposing to you. Of course I consented instantly. I not only give my consent to your accepting him—I urge you to do so. I would not agree to your marriage with any other man; but Louis Kay should have my right hand if it would do him any good; and though I cannot *give*

him my sister, yet I can and must ask her to marry him, if she would please me more than by anything else she could do. For nothing could please me so well as for you to marry him; *nothing* would anger me more than for you to refuse him. Think well about it, Kate. If you refused him (though I think better of you than to suppose you would do such a thing)—but *if* you did, you could no longer be my sister.’

There was much more in the same strain, and the letter ended—

‘Yours, as you act, WILFRID HEALEY.’

Pale, heart-sick, and trembling, Katharine finished the letter. The thing now seemed inevitable. It was no longer distant—it was near; it was daily, hourly, momentarily drawing nearer, and though it had been long expected, she felt the same shock on finding it thus imminent that we feel when death comes, even though he may have been hovering near for years.

She could not digest her letter then. The four walls seemed to stifle her. Soon afterwards she went out alone, and Louis made no effort to accompany her. Some one said 'Good morning' as she went down the lane that led to the shore. She looked up, but hardly recognised the figure of Thorgerd, who paused, with her hand on the vicarage gate, and looked wonderingly at her. She took her way to the shore, and walked slowly on for some distance, seeking a spot of solitude, where she might re-read and re-consider her morning's distasteful portion.

At length, considering herself secure from probable interruptions of fellow-beings, she turned aside and sat down on the shingle under a low wall, took out her letter, and read it again. Again? Twice, thrice, any number of times—each time with deeper bitterness and heart-sickness. Every susceptibility of her nature was wounded. She believed that Louis had got Wilfrid to

promise to write some such letter, so that her decision might be strongly influenced from the quarter whence alone she *could* be influenced. It was a fresh proof of the extent of Louis's influence over Wilfrid. Where Wilfrid was weak, Louis was strong.

'Oh! it is a cruel letter,' she reflected. 'What am I to either of them? Something to be useful to the one and give pleasure to the other. It is for themselves they care; not for me. It is for themselves they think.'

Then came the certainty that she was, as it were, fastened in a trap.

'Louis,' she thought, 'professes to adore me; says he is wrapped up in me; cannot live without me; that I have his happiness in my hands; but he never tries to think that *my* happiness, such as I have, is in *his* hands; or if he does, he soon puts the silly idea aside. I am to marry him to please him and Wilfrid, not because I wish it, or because it would make me happy.'

She reflected that she had no one to whom to turn—no one to advise her differently; that Mrs. Kay, as much as the others, would urge the marriage.

‘She wants me to marry Louis because I am rich——. It would be good for him; and she rather likes me too. She wishes me well; and what could be better for me than to marry her son? Does he not honour me by asking me?’

Her heart beat painfully as she contemplated her position, and realized that she had no one to go to, but that circumstances were hard and pitiless, and seemed to bear down with most unsparing cruelty upon those least able to resist them. Her heart was filled with an impotent indignation, and she thought, even while she felt her anger futile,

‘Some people are happy; some are miserable. There is no reason for it, and no appeal against it; and I—am one of the miserable ones. I cannot love Louis; I don’t want to

marry him. When he does ask me, I'll tell him so. He shall see that he only gets me because I cannot help myself. Why should not his feelings be hurt as well as mine ?'

And yet what good would that do ? She raised her eyes and saw yellow sands, a blue sea, and white-winged gulls flashing like silver as they skimmed across the sunshine. The rejoicing beauty of nature appeared like an insult—it seemed to flout her sorrow in her face. Her head drooped again as she thought—

'I do believe I am a most—miserable—woman.'

Indeed she was, just then. A kind of pity for her own loneliness and wretchedness came over her, and a heavy, down-pressing terror as well—a terror of something, she knew not what—which was not going to happen, but which had already taken place—a feeling that some calamity of immense weight was even now recorded in Fate's book against

her name—none the less awful because she could only feel that it was there without knowing what it was. A 'horror of great darkness' overcame her.

She knelt upon the stones and rested her forehead upon the wall, feeling it throb against the hard pillow. The struggle had long been thrust away; and we all know what a deferred struggle is when it at last has us fairly in its grip. She felt forsaken, cold, lonely, helpless. Now that the crisis had come, she had lost all power to decide or act; she could not determine for or against any course.

Was it right to marry Louis for present peace? Was it right to refuse Louis, and bring upon her his enmity and Wilfrid's estrangement?

It was to her a terrible moment. Her brain seemed to reel and swim with the uncertainty, the oppressiveness of her position. There was no light, and yet she dared not quit the subject without having found some ray of it.

A footfall close beside her, scarcely disturbing the loose pebbles which lay about. Katharine, still upon her knees, neither heard nor heeded, until a hand gently laid upon her shoulder, and the voice of Thorgerd Meredith roused her.

‘Dear Miss Healey, cannot I help you? You are in deep distress.’

Katharine looked up. In that face all was clear, honest, and pure. She trusted the nature that looked from Thorgerd’s eyes. The latter, on her part, did not start nor shrink away from the haggard face and distended eyes that met her view. She drew closer to Katharine, passed her arm round her neck, and stroked her cheek with her hand, saying, ‘Poor thing!’ in what seemed to the other the tenderest of voices.

‘Oh!’ said Katharine, letting her head sink upon Thorgerd’s shoulder, ‘I am very unhappy.’

‘Oh, you are indeed! And you are alone.’

Tell me, have you no one to speak with of your sorrow ?'

'No, no one,' sobbed Katharine. 'I am all alone.'

'I dare not ask you to tell it to me ?' said Thorgerd, half inquiringly.

Katharine shook her head. 'Some day, if you and I were very, dear friends, I might,' said she, 'but not now.'

'You must ask God—you must pray,' said Thorgerd, gently.

Katharine looked at her for a moment, and then, moved by the clear eyes and tender face to a passing curiosity, she asked, 'Is that what you would do ?'

'Yes. To whom else could I go ?'

Katharine was silent—unable to do what Thorgerd counselled, and yet dimly wondering whether it were God who had sent the girl to her. But her mind had been diverted from its intense, agonising concentration upon the one point. She felt as if the thing had

been suddenly decided for her ; a blind, cowardly way of shirking her responsibility as a reasoning animal, no doubt, but a course which has been adopted, ere now, even by eminent men and women, people who have made more noise in the world than ever poor faulty Katharine Healey did or will.

The feeling that she might turn aside from that cruel deliberation was almost delicious ; with it came a deep yearning towards the being who had interposed between her and her distress. She turned to Thorgerd and said, ' Did you follow me here ? '

' Yes,' said Thorgerd, blushing. ' Forgive me if I have been officious. You passed our gate as I was going in, and I saw that you were in deep trouble. I said to myself, " She has been so kind to me and Phœbe ; I *must* go and try to help her." Have I offended you ? '

' *Offended* me ! ' repeated Katharine, almost laughing. ' Could it be possible that Thorgerd,

sweet, gentle, charming as she was, *cared* for her sour, unlovable acquaintance?’

‘Thorgerd,’ she said hurriedly (if she had not done it quickly, it would never have been done at all), ‘have you a regard for me? Do you like me?’

‘Yes; I love you!’ said Thorgerd earnestly and simply, taking both her hands.

‘Can you—would you care to be my friend? I should love you—you do not know how much,’ said Katharine, eagerly and rapidly.

Perhaps, after all, life contained some few grains of the pure gold of requited affection. It might not be entirely a vast, sterile Sahara, full of the acrid dust of vanity, vexation, and disappointment.

‘I love you too, and I will be your friend,’ said Thorgerd, not without some suppressed emotion.

They kissed without a word, and Katharine rose from the ground. To her own intense amazement she found that she staggered

as she tried to stand. Her head was dizzy—her limbs trembled and felt weak.

She sat down again, and the two remained for what seemed to them but a short time in silence, Thorgerd's hand resting upon that of Katharine. For the latter, the scene surrounding her had now a new meaning. Perfect stillness was abroad, broken merely by the murmur of the tide at its lowest ebb, and the occasional harsh note of the gulls that wheeled around and above. The horizon line was hidden in a soft grey haze; the water danced and sparkled, and above was the mild yet exquisite sky of late September. Peace, peace, and calm, was the message of every breath of air, every sight, every sound; and if it did not bring to Katharine's heart pure peace, at least it helped to soothe and compose her.

Though it appeared to them that they had only been still so short a time, yet they had in reality sat nearly an hour. They took

their way towards the village again; and as Katharine rose the second time, she saw Wilfrid's letter lying upon the ground. She picked it up, put it into its envelope, and then, turning to Thorgerd, said, with an attempt at a smile—

‘This is my trouble, Thorgerd, and nothing can cure it.’





CHAPTER VI.

'K. Hen.—Thy speaking of my tongue and I of thine, most truly falsely, must needs be granted to be much at one. But, Kate, dost thou understand this much English—canst thou love me?'—King Henry V.

THEY had dined, and were in the drawing-room. Mrs. Kay, deep in the latest sensation novel, was a happy woman. Katharine, feeling sad, weak, and nervous, could settle to nothing. Louis did not apparently notice her. He was sitting at the piano studying a fugue with the deepest attention, and seemed lost in his music.

Katharine at last went away and upstairs to her own room. Moonlight streamed in there, and she threw open the window and

looked out. There was a touch of chillness in the air, but the night was very beautiful, and utterly peaceful. The long window of the drawing-room, too, was open, and she heard the tender strains of the music becoming longer, softer, and more lingering as the air was evolved for the last time, and at last, with one long dying note, ceased.

Katharine, though she did not move, trembled; clasped her hands—cold and chill as they were—more closely, and waited. She heard Louis push back his chair and say (and she knew he leaned over his mother's chair as he spoke)—

‘My dear mother, what horrors are you revelling in just now?’

Mrs. Kay murmured something abstractedly; and then, after a pause, Louis asked—

‘Where is Katharine?’

‘I really don't know, dear.’

‘She looks ill and tired to-day,’ said Louis, and directly afterwards Katharine saw him step

out of the drawing-room into the garden. He was close underneath her—a man who loved her very much—and a string seemed to tighten round her heart as she looked down upon him, so that she could hardly breathe.

He turned, looked up, and saw her, and his face lighted as a man's face does light when he sees the desire of his eyes before it has yet become his possession, and indifferent to him.

‘It is so lovely, Katharine. Will you come for a walk?’

‘Where shall we go?’

‘Out upon the beach. Put a shawl on. It is not late—unless you are tired?’

‘I will come; wait for me.’

She cast a light shawl about her shoulders, and went downstairs, and out—to him.

In less than five minutes they stood upon the shore, and Louis led the way to an old painted bench, one of the two which an enterprising spirit had erected, in the idea that

Penfynlas was in the way of being a fashionable watering-place.

‘Moonlight, rippling waves, solitude, stillness; it only wants a pair of lovers to make the thing complete,’ thought Katharine, with a cold chill of unpleasant anticipation.

She had now attained to that kind of mental numbness in which immense sacrifices seem trivial; not because they are really less immense, but because the weary mind cannot conceive them properly. Her present wish, so far as she was conscious of wishing anything, was that Louis would say his say, let her say hers, and so get the thing over. The future, happily, was always uncertain, and some wonderful unthought-of combination of circumstance *might* yet save her from what now seemed to be her fate.

She was leaning forward with folded arms; her cold, sad face was clearly defined against the moonlight. Katharine had no beauty—not a scrap—with which to attract either

Louis Kay or any other man. I fancy that such natures as hers rarely find love, but when they do—when they are loved, it is for ever and ever.

‘Katharine, do you remember what I once said to you at home? You asked me to wait, you know.’

‘Yes, I remember,’ she answered, her mouth settling down to sad repose, and her eyes fixed with a distant gaze upon the train of moonlight spreading over the water before her. How calm, how silvery it looked! Along such a road, by such a cold, white thoroughfare of duty, one might walk into heaven, surely! Sometimes in church they sing, ‘O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away *and be at rest!*’ It is almost the saddest as it is almost the deepest of the ‘sweet singer’s’ tones.

‘I think I have waited a good while,’ said Louis, whose low voice trembled, and

who laid his hand upon her wrist and looked almost fearfully in her face. 'Will not you give me your answer now?'

'Do you mean that you still love me, still wish me to marry you, Louis?'

'Still? Yes, indeed! I love you more; I shall always love you more deeply every day, every year. They say that men never worship women above all things, but, my queen, I do worship you; I worship all womanhood in you.'

'How wicked I must be that my fate will not allow me to love him!' thought Katharine.

'But,' said she, aloud, 'if I do not love you——?'

'Only trust yourself to me. You shall love me. I'll stake my soul upon it.'

'And you can be content with that, knowing that I do not care for you as much as I do for Wilfrid, and that I have never felt as if I could?'

‘More than content—supremely happy.’

A long, long pause, during which she looked back into his ardent, eager eyes without blushing or shrinking, but with a sad, imploring gaze. But he was not a god; his whole soul desired to be able to call that proud, tameless woman his own: he cared not what price he paid for the possession, and he missed the one thing that would have brought her to his feet. He could not say, ‘I love you; I set you free.’

‘Then, Louis—— I consent.’

Perhaps it was wrong, perhaps it was right of her to consent. I cannot answer for that. She had as many if not more faults than other women; she is not the first who has so acted, nor will she be the last. Throughout all the ages there have been, here and there, men and women who have found right and wrong, duty and error, twisted together in so inextricable a knot, that in very weariness of trying to untie

it, *and because time pressed*, they have cut it clean in twain, and so, as they fancied, solved the problem at a stroke—perhaps to find later that they have rather complicated it an hundred-fold, and made unto themselves two enigmas instead of one.

Who is infallible? Let him use his gifts towards his own salvation, and so shall he have profit; but let him not try to persuade any fellow-man or woman that he or she is in the wrong, and might have acted more wisely.





CHAPTER VII.

'Twas not the morn-blush, widening into day,
But evening coloured with the dying sun,
While darkness is quick hastening.'

—BROWNING.

KATHARINE and Thorgerd were pacing about the beach the next morning, Louis having said he would wait for the post to come in. In that remote place there was but one post a-day, and that not till noon.

'Thorgerd,' said Katharine, 'do you like my cousin, Louis Kay?'

'I seldom speak to him: I hardly know him.'

'That's an evasion on your part. You are

a crafty little thing. You have formed your opinion of him—what is it?’

‘I wish you would not ask me. I had rather not say.’

‘You think badly of him?’

‘I do not like him, but that may be my fault. I know nothing against him.’

‘But you feel as if you ought to know something against him. However, few people are bad all through—at least that is what I have been told, though I don’t say I agree with the dictum. But come, tell me something more.’

‘I think he is very fond of you.’

‘Oh, you could see that?’

‘I should think so,’ said Thorgerd, smiling, ‘and you——?’

‘I am going to—— I mean I am engaged to him.’

‘Indeed! May I congratulate you?’

‘Of course you may if you like. Nearly every one I know will congratulate me.’

‘I shall say nothing,’ said Thorgerd sadly, ‘for I see you are not glad.’

‘Louis says he is perfectly happy. It is something to be able to make a good man happy, isn’t it?’

‘Doubtless,’ said Thorgerd, very doubtfully.

They turned, and met Louis, Mrs. Kay, and Phoebe.

‘Here are the letters,’ said he. ‘There is one for you, Kate.’

He had never called her ‘Kate’ before, and now that he did so, she longed to bid him hold his tongue. Instead, however, she held hers, and put out her hand for the letter. He gave it to her without comment. It was from Ughtred Earnshaw again, and if Katharine did not notice the coincidence at all, Louis noticed it very particularly.

Her face brightened as she recognised the handwriting. With Ughtred were connected chiefly pleasant memories.

‘DEAR MISS HEALEY,—I have the pleasure to acknowledge your letter of last week. I write again, as I think you will be anxious to hear how things are going on ; but there is little or no news.

‘Crier is in the village again. He has got something, I fancy, for his work, wherever he has been, for he is doing nothing at present. He keeps very quiet, however ; he knows that he would not stand much chance among the work-people now ; we are running full time, and wages are up again, so the hands have nothing to complain of. In case Mr. Healey should not have written to you, I may inform you that he is very well. I saw him yesterday.

‘As to what you said in your last letter, I am too happy to bend to your wish in that as in every other respect.—Believe me to remain, yours most sincerely,

‘UGHTRED EARNSHAW.’

Well satisfied with the contents of her

letter, Katharine re-read it for the sake of the words, 'he is very well—I saw him yesterday,' and then laid it upon her knee, and went on talking to Thorgerd and Louis.

Mrs. Kay, who was some fifty yards away from them, beckoned to the two girls, who rose and went to her. In rising, Katharine let her letter fall to the ground. One of her bad habits was that carelessness about letters and papers—witness that document of which Ughtred Earnshaw had become possessed. Louis' eyes fell upon the letter, and he checked himself in his first movement to follow Katharine and Thorgerd. It stared him in the face. Had he not better pick it up and carry it after her? How singular that she should receive a second letter in the same handwriting as the one that came ten days ago—the letter which had caused her face to flush and her fingers to tremble. It was not from Wilfrid—he knew Wilfrid's handwriting as well as his

own——Who was it from ? ‘*Miss Healey, Glyn House, Penfynlas, S. Wales.*’ He perused those words several times, and studied Her Majesty’s effigy with commendable loyalty and attention, not thinking of it at all the while. It had annoyed him to see Katharine smile as she read that letter. He did not find it so easy to make her smile. Surely she could not wish to have any secrets from him ! She had promised to be his wife. A wife should have no secrets from her husband—she ought to confide in him implicitly. Somehow, he managed to stifle the corollary—a husband should confide in his wife implicitly. (Indeed, considered in the concrete, he would have denied the perfect truth of either proposition).

A few moments of hesitation ; then the thought, ‘I have a right to know everything concerning her——and, of course, I shall tell her what I have done when I restore the letter.’

He stooped down, took it up, drew it from its envelope, and read it word for word; and as he read, his face darkened.

‘It is high time,’ said he within himself, ‘that this was put a stop to.’ The worst of it was that he did not see his way at all clearly to putting a stop to it—just yet.

‘I said you wanted to see what was in Miss Healey’s letter the other day,’ remarked the voice of the child Phœbe, who had come up without his seeing her.

Louis had the rare property of being seldom or never startled into a look of amaze or embarrassment. He looked round calmly, and saw the elf-like child perched upon a large boulder, her chin supported upon her hands, her legs tucked under her, and her weird brown eyes fixed unquestioningly upon his face.

‘Miss Healey will soon be my wife,’ said he, with an indulgent smile. ‘She allows me to read her letters, and I allow her to read mine.’

‘What an awful story!’ said Phœbe, composedly. ‘You are very curious, and rather suspicious—that is all.’

Annoyed at her persistent gaze, he took the letter up, and when Katharine and her companions passed in their promenade, he withdrew her from them, and placed her arm within his, but could not get rid of the echo of those tiresome little words, uttered in the clear little voice—‘You are very curious, and rather suspicious—that is all.’

He looked at Katharine, putting the letter into her hand, saying—

‘Do you wish to keep this, Kate? I have been reading it, for you let it fall.’

‘You have——’ said Katharine, meeting Louis’ steady gaze. ‘At any rate you are honest, Louis; and I know of no reason why you should not read it, but—but——’

‘I ought to have asked you first, you think? Perhaps I ought; and I am sure I most humbly apologize if I have exceeded

my privilege. At the same time, Kate, if you had found a letter of mine lying about——’

(‘No fear of that!’ thought Katharine, in a parenthesis.)

‘And had read it, I should have been only too delighted that you cared enough about my concerns to take the trouble.’

‘It’s all right,’ she managed to say at last, feeling that it was all wrong in some way, though she could not explain how.

Whether Louis would have made confession if Phœbe (whom he anathematized within himself) had not, in a manner, forced him to it, can never be known. Since no other course lay open to him, he endeavoured to make a merit of necessity. His aim was to make Katharine feel, not that it was impertinent and officious in him to have read her letter, but that the fault had been hers in not having shown it to him of her own free will. His effort met with at least partial success.

'I did not know you were so uneasy about Crier,' he continued.

'I have never been easy since his attempt upon Wilfrid that night.'

'Can't you trust me to watch both him and Wilfrid?'

'You do not live in his sphere. When do you see or hear of him? Not once in three months. Mr. Earnshaw offered to help me in the most disinterested and generous manner, and I cannot feel grateful enough to him.'

This flashed out in a defiant tone. She felt, rather than knew, that Louis disliked her noticing Earnshaw, or treating him in any other way than as an inferior immeasurably beneath her. This she considered unjust and unreasonable; and she clung to her purpose of considering Ughtred as a friend, with a tenacity almost created by Louis' faint, contemptuous disapproval.

'Well, I do not know that there is any harm in it,' said he, reluctantly, at last.

‘*Harm !*’ repeated Katharine, in a haughty tone. ‘I do not understand you in the least.’

‘No, dear Katharine, I am afraid not.’

He was thoroughly pleased, however, at the quiet manner in which she had submitted to his authority. To him it seemed an earnest of the fact that now, at last, she belonged to him, and considered all her affairs his. It never struck him that perhaps she did not care enough about either the letter or himself, to waste words in disputing the point with him.

In fact, Katharine’s mind was running upon totally different matters. She was glad to hear from Ughtred ; she was pleased that he had at last unbent, and consented to sign himself ‘Yours most sincerely ;’ she was content that Wilfrid was well. As for her engagement, she felt as if any union with Louis was much further away, now that it was removed into the region of ‘some time,’ than when she had been waiting in daily expectation and fear of his proposing to her. She turned with more

and more delight to the friendship of Thorgerd, which was something as new as it was pleasant. There was an additional link between them in the fact that Thorgerd too was not by any means perfectly happy; for Katharine, poor woman! could never have fraternized with an entirely happy and prosperous person. The stay of the Kays at Penfynlas was drawing to an end, and Katharine was inwardly lamenting the fact that she and Thorgerd must soon part, when the happy idea struck her to write to Wilfrid, and ask if he objected to her bringing Thorgerd to visit her at Healey. She heard from him as soon as possible; the gist of his letter was—

‘Bring as many Welsh-women as you like; they won’t interfere with me, and come home soon; I want you.’

Ungracious enough, but it made Katharine quite happy. Wilfrid did miss her; and not only that—he confessed to standing in need of her presence.

Thorgerd looked intensely pleased at the invitation. Katharine told her that her home and her native place were the dullest, most depressing spots in the known world; but Thorgerd evidently longed to go, and Mrs. Meredith was most palpably delighted at the prospect of getting rid of her—possibly, as she acutely thought, for ever; and she desired Thorgerd to stay as long as possible, and discoursed to Katharine of the forthcoming winter, and the great difficulty of travelling in cold weather. She had learnt from Mrs. Kay a number of particulars concerning the Healey family, and the main idea left upon her mind in connection with the subject was, that Wilfrid Healey was a young man; that he was rich and unmarried; and that to Providence (for she was a pious woman) all things are possible.

So it was settled that Thorgerd should go to Hamerton with Katharine Healey; and the latter openly avowed her intention of not letting her leave till the end of the winter.

She was surprised to see how startled Louis looked when he heard of the arrangement.

‘Miss Meredith going back with you, Katharine! Have you asked Wilfrid?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Won’t she find it very dull?’

‘She is good enough to say that she does not mind it, and that Hamerton in winter cannot possibly be duller than Penfynlas.’

He said nothing; but she saw a letter that evening addressed to ‘Wilfrid Healey, Esq.,’ in Louis’ handwriting, waiting on the hall table with others, to be posted.





CHAPTER VIII.

‘In a glass darkly.’

TOWARDS the end of October business called Ughtred Earnshaw one night out of the village towards the town of Thanshope, though not very far up the road.

As he passed out of the kitchen, Mrs. Holden said—

‘If thou sees yon lass, Ughtred, I wish thou’d tell her I want her. Hoo’s no business to stay out so late.’

‘I’ll try to remember if I see her, Mrs. Holden. Is she somewhere in the village?’

‘Ay, hoo ought to be; hoo went to get a

tu'thri'' (two or three) 'things at store, and I reckon you'll see her somewheers.'

He nodded, left the house, and walked quickly up the gas-lighted village street, giving a glance into the various shops as he passed, with the view of ascertaining whether Sara were in any of them. She had now been at home about five weeks, and both her mother and Ughtred knew that she was a changed girl. He noted it in silence; but Mrs. Holden was accustomed to give distinct, if not very lucid, utterance to both her griefs and joys, and she complained very bitterly of Sara's changed ways.

'I canna for t'life o' me mak out what's come o'er t'lass,' she said, with angry wonder. 'Hoo's that awtered' (altered), 'I'm fair puzzl't to know whether hoo's my own lass at o', or a stranger.'

She demanded of Ughtred whether he too did not see the alteration, and he was forced to own that he did.

Formerly Sara's prevailing characteristic had been the unvarying evenness of her temper and spirits. About her there had been a calmness, a still, changless serenity, which in one dull of comprehension, or, it must be owned, plain in appearance, would have been called stupidity. But Sara was ignorant, not stupid; beautiful, not ugly; and in her case the manner was merely repose, and was rather agreeable than otherwise, forming as it did a delightful contrast to the wild spirits, and loud, coarse voices and conversation of her companions.

Now it was all changed. She was as fitful and moody as a girl well could be—now gay, laughing and talking with a volubility which astonished her two companions no little; then silent, grave, and forgetful to a wonderful degree.

Ughtred, when he thought about her, had come to the conclusion that something preyed upon her mind, and he was very sorry for her.

This evening, as he was looking out for her, he thought about her, and decided that she was an unaccountable being. He had asked her since her return how she had liked the place where she had been staying. Was she pleased with the country? and how did she like the flat, southern landscape?

To which she had answered, 'Eh! I don't know; I've ne'er thowt nowt about it,' and uttered rather a meaningless laugh.

Yet at moments he had seen her face express the deepest anxiety, looking in its unfamiliar trouble quite haggard and careworn. Once or twice he had seen her look at the clock, and then out of the window, with expectant yet sorrowful eyes. And yet again there were moments when she looked lovelier than ever, by reason of a glad, hopeful expression that her face took. But those moments were very few. None of these signs were read or noticed by Mrs. Holden, who had never been trained to observe expression, or

to search for effect, and thence reason to cause; but to Ughtred Earnshaw's acuter sensibilities each varying shade of expression was significative of something that lay behind.

The shops at Hamerton were nearly all on the same side of the street, and Ughtred had passed them all, and was on the outskirts of the village without having seen anything of Sara. He concluded that she had gone into some friend's house for a chat, and felt that he had done his duty at any rate in looking for her, and so went on.

The night was dark, but clear; the sky moonless, but enriched with multitudes of glittering stars. There was a touch of frost in the air, which came keen, life-giving, and bracing from the fresh and treeless moors. It was a night to make one young, to set one walking or running for the sheer pleasure of rapid movement in that 'nimble air.' Certainly it was not an atmosphere to encour-

age loitering, and yet Ughtred overtook two loiterers. They walked together, not on the footpath, but on the other side of the road. (In Hamerton they do not rejoice in two footpaths, except in the main street—that would be a piece of the wilful waste that causes woeful want.) A man and a woman; the latter had on a large shawl, which draped her head and shoulders, after the fashion common to factory-girls—it was drawn somewhat forward, and made a kind of hood or *capote*, overshadowing her face. The man had an overcoat and a hat, with a brim perhaps a trifle wide. Walking in the shadow as they were, and on that dark night, Ughtred did not for a moment attempt to recognise them, but passed on, and was soon far beyond them in his swift, striding walk. He half smiled to himself as he thought—

‘Another “courtin’” case; and they do not keep at such a respectful distance from each other as seems to be the usual habit of lovers

here. I'm sure Mary Sutcliffe and her young man, when I met them the other day, were separated by nearly the whole width of the road.'

He was now passing Healey, and he looked at it and slackened his pace. The great house slept silent and dark; not a single light in any window was visible from the road; the gates were closed, and this business-like young man, who had been walking to overtake his errand as if for dear life, suddenly came to a stop, and leaning against one of those gates, allowed himself to meditate as he rarely did meditate.

'I wonder when she will be back. Her last letter said soon. Ah! it seems a year since I saw her ride into the yard at Healey——; and why should not it be a year? What difference can it make to me? It ought to make none——; and yet it does. Seeing her ought to be nothing——, and it is something. By Jove!' he finished, with a

low laugh at his own thoughts, 'if she knew what a fool I am, how soon she would show me my place! I am an idiot.'

Perhaps he was; if so, it was only for a moment: then he gathered his wits together again, and went on his way to see Mr. Butterworth, the manager of the factory.

Mr. Butterworth resided in a house a cut above the ordinary Hamerton cottage—one might safely say several cuts above it. It was a house with two parlours, which were seldom or never used except when Mrs. Butterworth had visitors, on which occasions she threw open the state apartments, and made her guests at any rate miserable therein. For herself, those who best knew her would have found it quite beyond their power to say whether she ever felt miserable, or happy, or anything. A front kitchen, so called, was reserved for family use by Mr. and Mrs. Butterworth and the little Butterworths, while a smaller room, known as the back kitchen,

constituted the exclusive domain of the Butterworth 'girl.'

Ughtred knew better than to go to the front door, which, he was well aware, must have been locked, bolted, and chained for more than an hour; if, indeed, it had ever been opened that day. He took his way round to the back, and was received into the bosom of the Butterworth family with considerable cordiality. The eldest Miss Butterworth (*ætat.* five years) had a peculiar attraction for him; and when the greetings were over she climbed upon his knee as a matter of course, and reposed her small flaxen head against his waistcoat, with much the same still pleasure as is sometimes displayed by a loving dog to a kind master.

His business over (it was not important, and did not take long), he was invited by Mrs. Butterworth to remain and sup with the family upon toasted cheese and an apple tart, which repast would be ready at nine,

punctually. Mr. Butterworth was earnest in seconding the invitation, which he dared not have propounded on his own account; but Ughtred, with an obstinacy heightened, if not entirely induced, by the stifling heat of the room, excused himself on the plea of business, and made his exit as rapidly as possible.

Thinking of his own affairs, and walking quickly along, he suddenly ran against some one, and found that he was close to the Healey gates.

'*Confound——*' began the figure, angrily, and then Ughtred just discerned that the two people whom he had overtaken on his way to Mr. Butterworth's had not yet got beyond Healey.

With a curt 'Beg your pardon' he strode on, not looking at the loiterers.

He had walked for some two or three hundred yards, and was already in the village, when light swift footsteps overtook him, and

a figure flitted past, whose face he just saw in the lamplight.

‘Sara!’ he exclaimed, and she turned for an instant, thus discovering to him the fact that he had not been deceived—it *was* Sara. But she did not wait for him; she increased her speed, and almost ran along the street towards home. Ughtred on his part slackened his pace, forgot Sara, and returned to his own thoughts, so that he was yet some ten minutes in arriving at Mrs. Holden’s door.

Before he entered he became aware of that lady’s voice upraised ‘in mad expostulation;’ and on going in he found it was her daughter whom Mrs. Holden was upbraiding. Sara was seated at the table, her shawl thrown off her head, her arms crossed upon the table, and her face, lowering and sullen, turned towards her mother.

‘Thou’rt a reet naughty lass,’ her mother was saying as Ughtred entered; ‘and I’m

ill-vexed wi' thee. Thou shaps as if thou'rt fair off it. Thou's bin gossipin' and speerin' wi' some o' yon good-for-nowt lasses; and it's none a reet time o' neet for thee to be out by thisel'. Eh, by th' mass! but I'st be gradely well pleased when t' reet chap cooms, and thou'rt wed and away; and I do hope he may be one as 'ull keep a tight hand o'er thee, for thou needs it rarely.'

Ughtred, on his way to his own quarters, heard the tirade, and gave a glance and a smile, half of amusement, half of doubt, at Sara. She was looking down, and picking at the fringe of her shawl with fingers that trembled. Her face was dyed with blushes; even her mother looked puzzled at her embarrassment. Ughtred, struck with a sudden doubt, a sudden remembrance, passed on thoughtfully.

'Why, lass,' said Mrs. Holden, when he had gone, and speaking in a softer voice, 'thou's ne'er started a coortin' wi'out tellin' me?'

‘Nay, mother. What for sud I do so?’

‘Nay—what for? dule knows! Thou’rt not’ (her voice sank to a whisper) ‘got agate o’ likin’ yon Earnshaw?’

‘*Him!*’ said Sara, with a scornful laugh and a look of insolent contempt. ‘Not I, fur sure! I’st ne’er tak’ oop wi’ an under-strapper like yon.’

‘Lord ha’ mercy! if thou’s gotten’ them notions into thy yead, thou’ll ne’er be wed o’ this side grave.’

By way of offering a logical, reasonable, and lucid peroration to her remarks, Sara now burst into a storm of tears and wished she were dead.

‘I could wish nah’n then as thou’d ne’er been born!’ exclaimed her mother, who was now, to use her own expression, ‘past herself,’ and out of all patience. ‘Go thy own road, and I reckon thou’ll rue it afore thou cooms to th’ eend on’t.’



CHAPTER IX.

'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers ; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'



SUPPOSE one must humour even one's sister now and then.'

So, in soliloquy, Wilfrid Healey, tossing aside a letter from Katharine, which notified that she and Thorgerd would arrive at Healey that evening ; and praying him to be kind, and have dinner with them, and not take himself off directly afterwards—just for that once ; another time she would not ask him, but she wanted the first evening of her friend's visit to be cheerful.

The letter found Wilfrid in a complacent

humour, and he decided to comply with the wish expressed in it, speculating a little at the same time as to what *could* have induced Katharine to ask any one on a visit to their house.

He was not displeased to know that his sister would soon be back again; the void caused by her absence had quite surprised him. Her writing-table was unused; her papers were never about; a heap of pamphlets and prospectuses lay unopened on her davenport, and there were parcels of books and magazines awaiting her return. He had discovered this by straying into her sitting-room one day. And though they never held much conversation when they were together, he missed her at all the times when he had been wont to see, if not to hear her. He missed her too, in other ways—as his patient secretary, and the willing executor of all his behests. He had never undervalued her in that respect, but now that she was absent she rose ten times in his esteem,

for he found that she was yet more necessary to him than he had supposed. 'If she marries Kay,' he thought this morning, 'it will make it uncommonly awkward for me. If it were not for that business down at Haythorpe, I might—— but no ; better let things alone. When she is gone, Earnshaw will have to rise a step or two,—he deserves it. Kate trusts him, and I trust her.'

It was late in the afternoon when he came in from Manchester ; and having ascertained that the ladies had arrived, and were in their rooms, he made haste to his own, dressed, and came down again.

He supposed they would be in the drawing-room, and made his way there. It was rather a waste of a room, desolate because seldom used ; and Wilfrid paused at the door and gave a look round.

Katharine was not there ; but seated near the fire was a lady—her visitor of course.

She sat quite still, not having heard his approach, so he had a moment or two in which to study her.

There stole into his mind and heart, and over his senses, a feeling that was neither love, liking, nor admiration—a kind of soothing pleasure, a still satisfaction—a knowledge that it was good to look upon that face, and to be in that presence.

The fair, pale face, a little tired, and a little sad—

‘The mouth with steady sweetness set ;
The eyes conveying unaware
The distant hint of some regret
That harboured there.’

The very attitude, a little drooping, a little weary—all touched him. He was taken by surprise. Was it fortunate or not that he saw, not a beauty who enthralled his senses, but a white, ‘beautiful soul,’ and his rough heart was softened ?

His step now roused Thorgerd ; she looked up, rose, and with a faint blush, and a smile

which had in it a little timidity, bowed, but did not speak.

‘I must introduce myself,’ said Wilfrid.
‘Katharine *may* have mentioned me to you—’

‘Oh, yes, you are Wilfrid,’ she answered, quickly; and then, smiling, added, ‘Oh, I beg your pardon! Katharine always spoke of you by your name, and I am so—so very stupid about these things.’

‘Stupid!’ he laughed; ‘I am sure you are very discerning, Miss—a——’

A dead pause, during which he thought, ‘Confound it! I’ve forgotten her very name.’

‘My name is Thorgerd Meredith,’ said she.

‘And so Katharine persuaded you to come to this savage place?’ he continued, with unwavering gravity.

‘It was very kind of her to ask me. I am very fond of her. She is so simple, yet so great and strong. You must be very proud of your sister.’

‘Proud of Katharine?’ said he, looking at her curiously. ‘I don’t think it ever occurred to me to be proud of her.’

‘But she thinks so much of you; it is like worship, almost.’

‘It is a great pity she has nothing better to worship,’ was his answer, given, not in flippancy, but almost in humility. He all at once had a new light turned upon his sister’s conduct toward himself—the light of a generous woman’s admiration. The effect was not altogether flattering to his self-love. He remarked within himself, ‘If people call her disinterested and unselfish, perhaps they may call me the other things: you can’t display those excellent qualities, unless you are provided with something selfish and interested to afford them opportunity of exercise. But then I never did care what people called me or thought of me, and I hope I never shall.’

‘People,’ of course, means the world in

general, and may easily be exclusive of a person, or even two or more persons. At present it seemed to Wilfrid more desirable that this stranger should think well than ill of him. A graceful and gentle, if not a strictly beautiful young being, with a pleasant, low voice; with clear, innocent eyes, speaking plainly a language exclusive of envy and suspicion—with graceful little gestures (he was keenly susceptible to grace—to what the French call *esprit*), and lips that looked as if they could either tremble at a pathetic thing, or laugh at a humorous one—why should he shock a thing so agreeable by any display of cynicism or worldliness? It was just as easy for a man who believed in nothing, to talk orthodox optimism as unbelieving pessimism; and you are not bound to feel everything you say.

Here Katharine made her appearance, and when she saw him her face broke into smiles, and her eyes shone gladly, for she

knew at a glance that he would 'entreat her kindly,' and she held out both hands, saying—

'Dear Wilfrid, I am glad to see you.'

He kissed her, and looking at her searchingly, said—

'And I am glad to see you, though you are no longer mine.'

Her face fell. Instead of making any direct answer, she turned aside, and said—

'Have you and Thorgerd shaken hands and become acquainted with each other?'

'We have not shaken hands yet,' said he with gravity; 'but if Miss Meredith does not object to doing so, I am sure I do not.'

And he held out his hand, smiling—the sweet frank smile which may pertain to a bad man almost as well as to a good one.

Thorgerd looked at him doubtfully; but after that glance she placed her hand within his, which closed over it, and detained it for an instant in a friendly, well-pleased clasp.

That moment she remembered in after-

days—in the days when she sat desolate, and wondered what had ever led her path across that of Katharine Healey and her sorrow. Was it Chance, Fate, Providence, Destiny, or merely “a fortuitous concourse of circumstances”? or, more directly, are not those all but names for the same thing—the thing that we never can analyze, define, or agree about?

But the moment in which those questions were asked was not yet come, whereas the hour for dinner was.

‘Hamerton as happy as ever?’ asked Katharine.

Wilfrid shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

‘I don’t know, nor care,’ he answered. ‘Last Sunday I was riding past Bentfoot Church, and I found that Crier had organised a camp-meeting just opposite, on the common, and was shouting out to the people who went by not to turn into that house of Baal, but to come where they *could* hear the words of salva-

tion. Judging from his style of elocution, I should infer that those who can shout the loudest will first arrive in heaven.'

'Quite as reasonable a ground on which to assume priority of entrance as many 'others,' said Katharine, dryly; and then added quickly, 'Did he say anything to you?'

'*To* me, no; *at* me, yes. I stopped, for I wanted to hear what he had to say. He fixed a stony eye upon me, looked round, and said, "And Sabbath-breakers, such shall have," et cetera. It was rather a curious thing altogether. Upon my honour, you know, one would hardly think that in these days there could be people found to come and listen to such rant. I saw Earnshaw the next day, and advised him to go and hear Crier the next time he had an opportunity. He said he had heard him preach once, and had been much edified.'

There was a pause, and then Wilfrid said, reflectively—

‘There’s rather a difference, Kate, between Earnshaw and Crier.’

‘My *dear* Wilfrid ! I should think so !’

‘There’s something about Earnshaw — I hardly know what—a kind of simplicity and independence very uncommon. I like him wonderfully. I was nearly being off with him, though, the other day.’

‘Were you ? Why ?’ she asked, in a calm voice, but trembling lest he should actually have broken with Ughtred.

‘I thought him very cheeky in something that he said. He as good as told me I was all wrong and he was all right ; it was about a contract. However, when I came to think about it, it struck me that Crier used always to agree with whatever I said, so’ (he smiled, as if amused at his own yielding disposition) ‘I rode straight back, and told Earnshaw I would do his way after all.’

Katharine for the first time felt grateful to Ab o’ Ben’s influence.

After dinner she sat listening to the conversation that never ceased between Thorgerd and Wilfrid, until her own thoughts made her deaf to it.

‘How delightful he can be!’ she sighed to herself, and indulged in a little vision wherein she saw Wilfrid married, steady, softening and growing better as the years went on, and as he learnt how much better worth living was the higher life than the lower one.

‘If only that might be,’ thought Katharine, ‘his wife would be a happy woman;’ and she felt that to be sure of such a consummation for him she would gladly shrink away into an obscure, unnoticed place, and be a happy, uninteresting maiden aunt.

A humble enough vision! But so few visions, from the wildest to the meanest, ever come true. There is an awful satire in the way in which we ridicule our neighbours’ hopes, and the clearness with which we see their

futility, while our own are as high, as hot, as untamed as ever.

Katharine that evening busied her mind with the weary problem which has so often been put—

Who shall say whether this life of ours should be called the Human Comedy or the Human Tragedy? Ought we talk of life being a jest, or to weep over the 'Martyrdom of Man'? It is but a grim comedy, and yet it is somewhat small and ludicrous for a tragedy. Some one, after the aimless way common to poets and such like dreamers, has asked—

'I pray you, is death or birth the thing that men call so weary?'

Usually, Katharine seldom indulged in any reveries upon the past, or speculations as to the future; she had enough to do to make the present endurable, but the sight of Wilfrid laughing with Thorgerd, his contented look, and seeming freedom from care or trouble, brought very vividly to her mind the remembrance of the

sacrifice she had so lately agreed to, and she was stirred to wonder vaguely what it all meant, and whether *some time* humanity will read the answer to the riddle—Life. Shall we some time understand the plan in its entirety—so much agony to so much development; capacity for endurance strengthened because of pain being slowly piled up—for one may carry an incredible weight when it is only laid upon one in ounces at intervals. ‘Some say that the more work you can cram into life the happier you will be,’ thought Katharine; ‘but my life is full of work, and I am not happy. And the people who have plenty of play—*they* are discontented too. The rich grumble, the poor grumble. Young and old, wise men and fools (sometimes I wonder whether those are not two names for the same thing), men and women, all complain. Fortunately we are too busy complaining to question, for if we questioned much or considered much, I think we should all go mad.’



CHAPTER X.

Then came some tender rays of hope to us,
Like rose-hues touching distant snow-capped peaks,
Just ere the night falls, black and pitiless.

KATHARINE perhaps did not know herself, that in those first days after her return home she looked ever so much brighter, younger, and less careful than of old. If she did not know it, though, Ughtred Earnshaw did; he saw the change, and rejoiced in it—to a certain extent — not with unalloyed pleasure, for her greater happiness, or rather her lessened sadness, removed her further away from him. He thought so, at any rate, but he could not say that there was carelessness in her

manner, or that she had forgotten to shake hands with him when they met, or that her smile was less pleasant. Still, he knew that but for her troubles she would have been as far from him as the most distant star; and he was, unconsciously, willing that her troubles should continue so long as she had to come to him for help.

Now and then Thorgerd rode with Katharine up to Healey, and would wait patiently while her friend transacted her business. She was convinced that Katharine must have a wonderful mind; to Thorgerd 'business' meant long conversations in the style of the cotton and money market reports in the Manchester papers, followed somehow by the transference of gold into the pocket of one party and goods into the warehouse of the other, and nothing could make her see it in any other light. Katharine's brain, argued this logician, must be constituted differently from the brains of other women; and then she had, too, a

remarkable brother—a man who appeared to understand everything, from ‘T. cloths’ to the right kind of horse for an inexperienced and not too brave young horsewoman, and who had, too, a manner of urging his wishes (especially in the matter of the riding) which could not be gainsaid—by a visitor. It was a totally new life to Thorgerd, a life which she found very charming. Her life had been calm and unstirred until the arrival of that disturbing element — her stepmother, since whose advent she had ceased to look upon men (or women either) as only ‘a *little* lower than the angels.’ Thorgerd would never be a fine woman, a dashing woman, or a noted woman, but she would always be a charming one. Katharine and she, so different in almost all respects, were alike in their inability to carry on one of the lukewarm beau-and-bonnet sympathy friendships which help to pass the time for many young women of their class. But the right chord had been struck, the

inner life touched, and they were sisters in the only true sense of the term. Ughtred guessed a good deal of this, and after a while was glad of it, for Thorgerd's face pleased him strangely. It was the complement to Katharine's—it showed the southern side of her nature; that side which he had never seen, which he only knew by conjecture and speculation.

Another and a much more obvious cause for Katharine's cheerfulness never presented itself to his mind, until it was, in a manner, forced upon his attention.

A woman one morning came up to the yard with her husband's 'baggin,' or between-meal—a kind of lunch. As she passed out she held a short, friendly dialogue with the manager. He knew her, for she lived next door to Mrs. Holden.

'You'n a throng time on't, I reckon?' she began.

'Yes; we are rather busy, Mrs. Clegg.'

'But it's vary well for us. Eh! but he's makin' a seet o' brass, is yon Wilfrid Healey! There were a chap says to me t'other day, he says, "Yon Healey fair stinks o' brass." And he're reet. Some folk met 'appen make a better use on't. Not but what he's a rare pleasant way wi'm when he's a mind. I were talkin' to him one day, when he'd o'ertaken me in t' lone' (lane), 'and when I said summat about th' childer, he axed me how many had I. I tow'd him as how t' babby were nobbut six week owd, and he says, "Ah, and is he kerstened yet? and what will you call him?" I said as we hadn't settl't on a name, not then; and he says, "What dost think o' Moses? It's a good Bible name." "So it is," I said, "and I'st think on't." "Do," he says, "and I'm sorry it's again my principles to stand god-feyther." "Eh! thankyo'," I says, "axin' yer pardon; I think it's all t' better as yo' should na' go a-mellin o' they sort o' things."

And he laughed—ay, he did so. Howsever, we settl't for t' name th' babby Charles, and we thought as how Aaron 'ud go better wi' that nor Moses, so we had him kerstened Charles Aaron.'

'A very uncommon name,' was Ughtred's strictly conscientious reply.

'Ay, it's a bit out o' th' way like. Yon's Miss Healey, and t' lass hoo's got a visitin' of her, comin' ridin' oop. Hoo looks more cheerful like nor hoo did, and time for her. Young chaps is none so fond o' a long face in t' lasses they're bound to wed; and hoo's likely cheered oop a bit sin' yon Louis Kay's bin a coortin' of her.'

'What do you mean?'

'Eh! doesn't ta know? Hoo's boun' to wed him, and folk do say as how he's fair fond o'er her.'

Further conversation was cut short by the entrance of Katharine and Thorgerd.

Mrs. Clegg said, 'Well, good-day to you,'

and went away down the lane, leaving her late hearer somewhat excited and surprised.

In a short time the ladies rode away again, and half-way down the lane they met Wilfrid and Louis, also on horseback.

'Ah, I thought I should find you here,' said Wilfrid. 'I met Kay, and we will ride home with you if you are ready.'

With that they turned ; riding in that narrow lane two abreast—Wilfrid and Thorgerd in front, Katharine and Louis behind.

Katharine had grown used ere now to see Wilfrid bend closely his handsome head towards Thorgerd, to hear the softened inflection of his voice when he spoke to her, and the constant return of his eyes to her face. To Louis,, however, the symptoms were not quite so familiar, and he now watched the riders for some time in silence.

At last, turning to Katharine, he said, with what struck her as much gravity, little pleasure, and some astonishment combined—

‘Wilfrid seems decidedly *épris* in that quarter, Katharine.’

‘Do you think so?’ said she, rather eagerly; ‘if I were only sure of it, how glad I should be!’

‘Either it is so, or——’

‘Then it is so. Wilfrid is as open as the day,’ said Katharine, with her eyes dwelling so fixedly upon that same Wilfrid, that she did not see Louis’ look, and the smile, or sneer upon his lips.

They were now riding up the village towards Healey, slowly pacing up the street, and still in their processional order. The hands were all streaming home from their work, so, of course, one and all had a stare (which on some too-expressive countenances became a gape) and a passing remark for the party.

Wilfrid, still bending towards Thorgerd, said something with a smile, at which she looked up quickly, her eyes smiling, though

her lips were grave, and her face was suffused with a beautiful blush. She shook her head and looked away. His eyes rested upon her sweet face, half sadly, half triumphantly, for an instant; then he raised them, and glanced aside. On the footpath a group of factory girls was hurrying along, all intently staring at himself and his companion. As his eyes fell upon them there was more than one nudge and several delighted giggles, for Wilfrid was not unpopular amongst the female portion of his work-people. He just saw the girls, and then, with a sudden startled look, his eyes fastened upon another figure. This woman was not staring at him: she gave one timid, deprecating look, and their eyes met; then she drew her shawl more closely around her, her head drooped, and she hurried on. He bit his lip, frowned, drew a long breath, and looked no more at the vision, which could hardly have been a

pleasant one. He was silent, not even speaking to Thorgérd, who at last looked up and saw that his face was full of trouble.

‘ You are thoughtful ? ’ said she, half timidly.

‘ Yes,’ he answered ; but she saw that he had not replied to her, but to her words, which were the very echo of his mood.





CHAPTER XI.

'It is not man's to dream in sweet repose ;
He toils and murmurs as he wondering goes,
Poor, changeful glitter on the stream that flows .
In lapses huge and solemn roar,
Ever on without a shore.'—*My Beautiful Lady*.

'There's some vile juggle with my reason here.'

—BROWNING.

WORDSWORTH, in one of the
sublimest poems ever written, tells
us many things, high crystalline
truths that are sometimes set up in heaven
so far above our heads that we fail to under-
stand them. He tells us that there are certain

. . . 'First affections,
Those shadowy recollections'

which

. . . 'Have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence.'

A deep, poetic utterance, none the less true because there are people whose own experience would never confirm or explain it, and because to others the 'noisy years' have power generally to outweigh and smother all the still, awful lessons of the 'eternal silence.'

For Katharine, just now, the aspect of life seemed a little brighter. She believed that Wilfred and Thorgerd were really drawn to each other, and the change in him at any rate was very great. It was shown alike in looks and actions. Katharine hardly knew whether most to rejoice or to tremble at the difference, but it was so sweet that joy came unbidden and was too new and delightful a guest to be summarily dismissed. Yet there was that in Wilfred which made her uneasy. She was almost sure that he was deeply in love with Thorgerd, but she did not understand his way of showing (or trying not to show) that love. Generally there was rather a sledge-hammer directness in his actions and words, and she could not

conceive his being in the least timid or bashful in his courtship, however much he might reverence his mistress. In any case, and under all circumstances, he would be the absolute master, as she well knew ; and yet there were times when in Thorgerd's company, by her side, talking to her, making her talk to him, the look in his eyes was certainly not Wilfrid's free, unfearing glance. Katharine was puzzled. Surely her brother did not fear for the end of his wooing. She smiled at the idea, and tried to forget the subject, and by-and-by came interruptions ; she did not forget it.

It was now November, and the evenings, said Mrs. Kay, closed in about the middle of the afternoon. Katharine generally, though not always, paid her daily visit to Healey in the afternoon, and it was oftener than not dark when she had finished her business and rode away. This was nothing new to her. She had done it for years, as regularly as winter came round.

To Ughtred Earnshaw, however, it was something both new and unpalatable—this riding about, unattended, in the dark. It was a thing so unpleasing to him that once he ventured to allude to it, on a particularly foggy and miserable afternoon.

Katharine had mounted, and was gathering the reins in her hands.

‘I’m afraid it is very unpleasant for you to ride down this lane in the dark,’ said he.

‘I could wish for a lamp or two,’ she answered, smiling. ‘But the mud is the worst part of it. Lamps would not do away with that. Those heavy carts make it almost impossible to keep the road in order. And to take another view of the case, it must be very unpleasant for you to have to *walk* home through such a lane, Mr. Earnshaw.’

‘I can rough it,’ he answered. ‘I was thinking of the darkness and solitude for you. Are not you nervous?’

‘I have no business with nerves. And as

for darkness and solitude,' she added, with a short, constrained laugh, 'thank you; I am used to them both.'

It was not his place to offer any comment upon her speech. He was therefore silent, but he still looked doubtfully down the dark, obscure lane. They were standing in the gateway. The big iron gates were both open. From the arch above hung a lamp, the only light from there to Hamerton. In half an hour it too would be extinguished, and Earnshaw and the men would wend their way home in the utter darkness of a November moonless evening.

In the distance was an angry red glow—it warmed the blackness of the air, but that was its only merit; and against it showed up some unwieldy-looking buildings, kilns, or furnaces, where earthenware pipes and tiles were baked, and to the manufacture of which it seemed necessary that a steam pipe should give vent to a hollow, dreary, hooting noise,

terminating in a prolonged sepulchral whistle, which finally died into a hiss, and was cheering in the extreme. Here and there was a lighted factory; where the village was, clustered a great many lighted factories.

‘A strictly Hamertonian loveliness,’ said Katharine, shrugging her shoulders, and pointing with her whip to the distant glow.

‘I like it; in these dark evenings it is company as I walk home.’

‘Well, one requires company, I suppose, if only to escape from oneself. Good-night, Mr. Earnshaw.’

Then she rode away: he soon lost sight and sound of her, and returned to the office.

Before arriving in the village, Katharine suddenly remembered a paper she ought to have given Earnshaw concerning a contract just concluded with a Manchester firm for coals—the delivery to commence on the following day.

‘How stupid!’ she muttered. ‘Shall I

have to ride back all that distance? He must have it to-night, or there will be a mess to-morrow.'

She paused, undecided, balancing the forgotten document in her fingers.

'I know,' was her decision. 'I can leave it with Mrs. Holden.'

Restoring it to its place, she rode on, and in a few minutes rapped with her whip upon Mrs. Holden's door.

That lady appeared to answer the summons. 'Can you get me a pencil and a bit of paper, Mrs. Holden?'

'Eh! what? Why, it's Miss Healey. Nay, I'st gotten nowt o' that mak', but I'st geet them from Mr. Earnshaw's room.'

Katharine waited, and presently Mrs. Holden returned with a small paper-case and a lead pencil.

'I reckon you'll find some paper i' that,' said she.

There was a lamp close by, and Katharine

opened the paper-case where something between the leaves caused them to part easily.

What met her eyes startled her no little. Staring into her face was a *carte de visite* likeness of herself—one taken years ago, hideous enough.

She was still bending over the paper-case, and gazed down, startled and bewildered, at the distorted image of her own features which looked back into her eyes.

Scarcely knowing what had happened, she gently closed the case, and sat quite still a moment, reflecting. It slowly began to dawn upon her that she ought to feel angry or offended, but she did not in the least; not in the very least. She was surprised, and a feeling came over her which she could not explain; a feeling which made her lip tremble, her eye grow dim, her bosom heave with a long sigh. She knew not what the feeling was: she only knew that she should so like

to burst into tears—if she had not been so lonely.

‘Pshaw!’ she muttered at last, and she merely wrote upon the back of the envelope the words—‘I forgot to give you this this afternoon. Please see that it is attended to to-morrow.—K. HEALEY.’ This she gave to Mrs. Holden, bade her deliver it to Mr. Earnshaw, and departed.

‘Where, and how can he have got it?’ was her reflection, as she rode home at a slower pace than usual. She remembered the history of that likeness well. Her mother, not long before her death, had persuaded her to go to Thanshope, and have her portrait taken by the (then) sole professor of the art of photography there resident—one not too proficient in his vocation.

She had yielded, and the likenesses had arrived one evening when Wilfrid happened

to be at home. He had seized them, and made game of them, saying that they gave her the air of a murderess—that she had been presented gratis with a beetle brow, a sinister cast of the eye, and the most villainous sneer that it had ever been his lot to encounter. Wherewith he had demanded of his audience if it were not so. Louis Kay, also present, had assented, at the same time quietly and calmly possessing himself of one of them, and putting it into his pocket book.

Wilfrid, saying, ‘No, no, I’ll have no such disreputable characters in my house,’ had then and there tossed the whole bundle into the fire, with Katharine’s hearty consent, but sorely to his mother’s distress. He was not wont to consider his mother’s feelings, however, nor those of any one else.

And as for Louis, who sketched almost as well as he sang, ‘He had no need of that likeness,’ thought she, dropping her

hands upon her horse's neck, and letting the rein hang loose as she rode on, slowly and absently. 'He has drawn my face scores of times, and always manages to make my eyes look starry, or to put a wonderful soul into my face, which does not belong to me. Still, he has kept that old photograph, I know.' Beyond that, so far as Katharine knew, there was not a single likeness of herself extant, and yet—there it was in Ughtred Earnshaw's paper-case.

Katharine found herself still puzzling and wondering over it as she rode up to the Healey gates more than half an hour later than usual.

'Bah!' said she to herself, impatiently; 'as if it could matter. Let him have it if he likes. If he does his duty, and is as respectful as ever, why need I know anything about it?'

Two persons stood close beside the gate—a man and a woman; and Katharine heard the words, hastily spoken by the man—

‘But I say you must not come in now. I assure you I will tell him, and make it all right.’

‘*Louis!*’ ejaculated Katharine.

Something like ‘Confound it!’ was uttered very heartily by the gentleman; and the woman to whom he had been speaking turned, and went without a word towards Hamerton.

‘You don’t welcome me,’ said Louis, carrying Katharine’s hand to his lips, for she had arrested her horse in her surprise. ‘I have come to dinner,’ he added. ‘You invited me yourself, Kate; and I have walked, as the night was fine.’

Katharine felt no pleasure from the tone of subdued, respectful tenderness—no thrill of delight when he bent his handsome head over her hand. The gesture was no doubt graceful, and gracefully done; it might be his way of expressing his gratification at seeing her, or it might be done to gain time and divert her attention.

‘To whom were you talking?’ she demanded, bluntly, and riding towards the door.

He rang the bell as he answered—

‘To a tenant of mine, who has been complaining about my agent.’ And he looked full at her as they stood in the lamplight.

‘Louis!’ she said, piteously, ‘why will not you trust me? Why do you conceal things from me? You are most cruel.’

‘Dearest Katharine, I do trust you. I have just now answered your question. Put me as many more as you like ; I will reply to them all.’

She turned away, shaking her head, with all the light gone from her face ; but he, lifting her from her horse, whispered—

‘My sweet, you do not trust *me!*’

During the whole of dinner-time Katharine was absent and preoccupied. The sense of concealment and mystery around her disturbed and irritated her. She scarcely heard what Louis was saying in his low, liquid tones. Two scenes she had that day passed through,—

nay, three were before her mind, to the exclusion of all else. Now she stood with Ughtred Earnshaw at the gates of the colliery yard, looking down the dark lane, and seeing the angry glow of the furnaces in the distance before her; then rode away from him, and from the only light and bright spot around, into the darkness and solitude. She heard his expostulation, his gentle hint at the unfitness of those long, dark rides for her; his tone as he said '*I can rough it*' ('meaning that I could not, I suppose,' she thought, with rather a bitter smile).

Again, under the lamp opposite Mrs. Holden's door, she opened the paper-case, and felt anew the shock of surprise and of something like timidity to which she had suddenly thrilled at the sight of that faded photograph.

Lastly, she heard again and again Louis Kay's words to the woman (who had, she reminded herself, a shawl over her head) at their gates; how he spoke with some impa-

tience, and yet with an attempt at soothing, almost at conciliation. How strangely silent that woman had been! How quietly she had turned and walked towards Hamerton! Her attitude, and the droop of her head, had expressed despondency. She had kept her shawl tightly around her, and Katharine had not obtained the least glimpse of her face. Louis had said it was one of his tenants, complaining of his agent. Why, then, did he say, 'You must not come in now'? His agent did not live there. Katharine was oppressed. Down-right danger in the open day, with the sun shining upon it, would be more desirable than these dim nothings, so impalpable, that whether they were facts or fancies she could not tell. Fears seemed to flutter round her—

'Shapeless and shadowy,

Like some dumb creature that sees coming danger.
And breaks its heart, trying in vain to speak.'

She answered Louis almost at random, was utterly *distracte*, and was glád when she and

Thorgerd could go to the drawing-room, that she might have silence, and pursue the train of her reflections uninterruptedly.

They were not, however, left long alone. Wilfrid and Louis joined them, and then there was silence no longer.

Katharine noticed the smile and the faint blush with which Thorgerd greeted Wilfrid, when, as usual, he took his place at her side immediately on entering the room, and she thought, 'No doubt her reflections have been pleasant enough. She has no complications in her affairs, and but few troubles.'

Louis, with the tact which, in regard to Katharine, scarcely ever failed him, did not approach her when he saw her sitting silent and apart, but went to the piano and began to play softly. The drawing-room at Healey was large, and had many recesses, in one of which stood the piano. The people conversing at one end of the room (when they spoke in voices so softly modulated as that of Louis

Kay) could not be heard by those at the other. Louis had that evening come with a purpose,—one that Katharine had been expecting and dreading to hear of. He wanted her to name a time when their engagement should end; he wanted her to marry him, and he was determined to persuade her to marry him soon.

‘Why not leave things as they are?’ pleaded Katharine. ‘I have given up so far,—yielded so much,—why need we talk about anything else?’

‘At that rate I may wait for ever,’ answered he, smiling, ‘and that I have no intention of doing. Come, Katharine, I have been very patient; do you be more indulgent. Say you will be married—when? how soon?’

‘I shall wait a year,’ she answered, slowly and resolutely.

His face turned blank indeed.

‘My dearest, do you know what you are saying?’

‘Perfectly well. If I dared, I would say **two**

years. Two? Ten, twenty, any number of years.'

'Oh, Katharine!' he exclaimed.

She was silent.

'I hope you do not mean that. If we wait six months, though there is not the least need for it——'

'I will have a year, or I will never be married at all,' she replied, her face growing paler, and her lips taking an obstinately resolute turn, as Wilfrid's did sometimes. Louis knew that he might as well try to move Blackrigg moor in the distance, as Katharine or her brother when they spoke so. Hitherto he had found a philosophic calm the best way of treating the symptom; but then it meant one thing in Wilfrid's case, another in Katharine's.

'A year!' he echoed, and his voice told how bitterly disappointed he was.

'Yes. Dear me! if we are to spend such a long array of years together, surely we may

lose one of them without harm to ourselves.'

'I don't think so. Every day spent with you is a gain.'

'Then, Louis, you must bear with some losses. I mean to consult my own feelings for *once*, and I shall do as I have said. Even Wilfrid would not succeed in talking me over. In this case I mean to have my own way.'

'I think it is a rather unreasonable way, Katharine, if you will pardon me for saying so.'

'Oh, say what you like. Women are always unreasonable, are not they? I have been given to understand from my youth up that such is the case, and such the reason why men are made lords over them.'

'You know you don't believe in that exploded nonsense.'

'What does it matter what I believe?' said she, anxious to follow up any new topic. 'If the rest of the world believe it,

I am simply a lunatic for not being mad in the same degree as the rest of the world.'

'You are always talking in that disagreeable strain.'

'I *am* disagreeable. Do you expect to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Because your Bible——'

'Your Bible! My dear Katharine, don't you know that, as Browning says,

"There's a new tribunal now,
Higher than God's—the educated man's."

At least, so many people say.'

'A good many people, however, do not, at least if we are to believe them. Strange! there's no book so much read and so little acted upon!'

'Do you think it *is* so much read?'

'I was reading the other day the Scripture Statistics, the number of Bibles sold in England every year. I forget the exact figure, but it was something enormous.'

‘People don’t always read the books they buy.’

‘No; that’s very true. Every house that has any pretensions to literature possesses the complete works of Sir Walter Scott, Milton, Shakespeare, and the *Proverbial Philosophy*; but how many copies of the first three are cut?’

‘True, O Katharine!’

‘The hypocrisy of this age is something frightful. Suppose every one called the book or the person who really regulated his actions his Bible, what queer ones there would be in some cases! I read the other day that the writings of John Stuart Mill have more practical influence upon men than all the sermons from all the pulpits in England, and I believe it.’

‘Very likely. Everything is improved now. Even our creed has become scientific. For the theory of the Fall of Adam we have substituted “The Descent of Man”——’

‘Louis!’

‘Ah, I don’t regret the pun, for it has actually made you laugh.’

‘Oh, Louis, if your mother could hear you! But the idea grows upon one—it does indeed; for the Fall, the “Descent of Man,” I declare it is a very pretty thought. But to return to my “Characteristic Creed” idea. The men about here would take the reports of the Cotton, Flannel, and Money Markets for their Bibles; their temples and high-priests are their mills and managers; and if they owned the truth, they would not say the Apostles’ Creed in church, but would confess to their God being Cotton.’

‘And a good one too. Why don’t you write a book on the popular theology? And what philosopher have you been studying lately?’

‘Myself, and the Hamerton world, which seems a very fair reflection of the world at large.’

Louis laughed, half to himself.

‘What amuses you?’ asked Katharine.

‘I just remembered a case of the emptiness of worldly pretensions. It really was very instructive.’

‘Tell me the story.’

‘A fellow I know was over here the other day. He lives at Thanshope, and as he has a clear genealogical tree from his great-grandfather downwards, he plumes himself upon being well descended, and means to stand for Thanshope at the next election as a Conservative.’

‘Louis,’ said Katharine, laughing, ‘you would not say that if you were not quite secure as to your own descent.’

‘He went with me into one of my cottages, and presently got upon politics with the man who lived there, and who sat smoking his pipe, and putting in a word now and then, looking perfectly expressionless all the time, and as if he were carved out of wood.’

‘Yes, I know their way.’

‘Till my companion began to touch upon his family, and presently drew himself up, and said that his people had come in with the Conqueror.’

‘And the man said——?’

‘The man looked at him, took his pipe out of his mouth, and said, “Ay, vary like; and we were here when you coom.”’

‘Very good,’ said Katharine. ‘But don’t let our conversation become biographic. Have you any more “anecdotes of remarkable men” to tell me?’

‘I think not, at present.’

‘Then come and play for me. There are three things that I have put aside for you; the “Consolation” first, that fugue of Bach’s next, and then you must sing “Cara Lisa.”’

‘If you will come with me to the piano.’

‘Oh, gladly,’ said she, rising. And the rest of the evening was passed by those two in music, while Wilfrid and Thorgerd sat apart, either silent or talking, but either way content.



CHAPTER XII.

'I know that what we all want is inward rest—rest of heart and brain—the calm, strong, self-contained and self-denying character, which needs no stimulants, for it has no fits of depression ; which needs no narcotics, for it has no fits of excitement ; which needs no ascetic restraints, for it is strong enough to use God's gifts without abusing them. The character, in a word, which is truly temperate, not in drink or food merely, but in all desires, thoughts, and actions.'—

CHARLES KINGSLEY.



ATHARINE felt that she had at any rate a little breathing space before her. She was thankful now that Louis had been made to understand her intention : she met him with a franker smile, a more ready clasp of the hand, and she suffered his kiss without feeling that he had such an absolute right over her.

Sometimes small mysteries remain uncleared

until they become great ones, and have a definite power for evil. Katharine's mystery, however, was soon cleared.

She and Thorgerd drove, the day after that discovery of the likeness, to Thanshope to do some shopping.

Thanshope is a hideous town, through which flows the river Thanse, a dark and polluted stream, whose evil odour betrays its evil nature. The Thanshope people have a happy and vivid consciousness that they and their town are unsurpassed in England or any other country. and can thus afford to pass by with amused contempt the ill-bred person who described Thanshope (in a leading article of a London daily paper) as 'a fifth-rate provincial town.' The Thanshope Town Hall cost a great deal of money and a great deal of quarrelling. Already the gilding on its spire is tarnished and dulled with the smoke of many mills. The streets—— but what of that? After all, it is the heart which confers

excellence alike upon places and things, men and women.

Thorgerd asked Katharine to take her to a shop where she could buy some etching pens, as she had finished her store.

‘My dear child, I doubt whether in this centre of civilization we can get such a thing. Let me see!’ And she reflected upon the resources of Thanshope.

‘Go to Preston’s, in —— Street,’ said she to the coachman; and then, turning to Thorgerd, she added, ‘If they are to be got, it will be there.’

‘Preston’s’ was a new shop, where drawing copies were sold, and where you might buy lithographs and wood-carving tools. It was considered in Thanshope a most superior establishment.

They asked for etching pens, and while the shopman went on his quest for them, with the air of a man who has his work before him, and work, too, that will not be

over in a moment, they looked at the photographs, which lay in little heaps in a glass case on the counter.

Suddenly Katharine uttered a quick 'Ah, there it is!' and pointed to a likeness.

Thorgerd peered at it.

'How hideous!' she ejaculated, looking unrecognizingly at it.

'Open this case, and let me look at those likenesses,' said Katharine as the man returned and deposited various pens before Thorgerd, who began to examine them.

The man took out some half-dozen or so of likenesses like that Katharine had seen in Ughtred's paper-case.

'Where did you get these?' she asked.

He looked at the back of one. 'It is part of the old stock,' said he. 'Mr Preston bought up a quantity of things when he came, from Mr. Ellis, and we have been trying to sell them off.'

Ellis was the man who had taken the

photographs, and who had sold his business to Preston.

‘But these are portraits,’ said Katharine severely, though intensely amused that neither Thorgerd nor the shopman had the least suspicion *whose* portraits they were. ‘The original might object strongly to having them sold.’

‘We have only sold one,’ said the young man, looking foolish. ‘The likeness is of some one so exceedingly plain, it would stand no chance among those we display in the window.’

‘To whom did you sell one?’

‘To a young man, last week, who was buying some other photographs. He seemed to know who this was meant for. He looked some time at them, and then chose the one he thought best; but he said they were hardly to be recognized.’

‘Put all that you have up for me. I will take them.’

‘But, madam, as you said, the lady might object. I had perhaps better destroy them. Mr. Preston thought it might be a hactress or a singer.’

‘It happens to be a likeness of me,’ said Katharine, coolly, ‘so you will be good enough to do what I tell you.’

Almost frozen with dismay as he remembered the freedom of his late criticisms, the young man hastened to secure the likenesses (or unlikenesses) in a small parcel, and handed them to the original.

‘But I don’t understand,’ said Thorgerd, wonderingly; ‘what do you want with the likeness of such an ugly woman as that?’

‘A fancy of mine,’ said Katharine, carelessly.

That afternoon Katharine rode up to Healey; her business was soon over; it occupied but a few minutes, but, pausing at the gate, even as she had done the day before, she said—

‘Did you get the packet I left for you last

night? I stupidly forgot it, and had to call with it at your lodgings.'

'It was all right,' answered he.

'I have another order for you to-night,' she observed, drawing out her pocket-book.

'I must not forget it this time;' and she opened the book.

Something fell out as she searched for the paper she wanted; fell, and lay on the road. Ughtred stooped, and picked it up; it was one of the likenesses.

With a perfectly unchanged face he handed it to her, saying, 'You have dropped this.'

She looked at it for an instant, doubtful what it was, and then her eyes leapt to his face, cool and searching.

'Oh, that — yes,' said she, indifferently. 'I called at Preston's in Thanshope this morning, and found six of these staring up at me from under a glass case. Did you ever see any one like it?'

He took it in his hand, and studied it atten-

tively; then, looking up at her with a smile, said—

‘I hope I shall not offend you if I ask whether it is meant for you.’

‘It is indeed. They were put there for sale. I was very much annoyed. The man said a man had bought one last week. I suppose he must have wanted it to put into a “Chamber of Horrors”’ (Earnshaw smiled involuntarily). ‘I brought them all home, and shall destroy them.’

‘They are not at all beautiful,’ he answered quietly, not wincing for an instant under her clear eyes, which had never left his face during the short dialogue.

‘Will you kindly tear that one up for me?’

He complied, without a word, tearing it thrice across, and then tossing the little fragments upon the road-side.

‘Thank you,’ said Katharine, smiling gravely. ‘Here is the paper. Good afternoon.’

As she rode away, she thought about the incident, and in thinking of that she unconsciously thought a good deal about Ughtred Earnshaw too. Her reflections were something after this fashion:—

‘I believe I can trust that man; I am pleased with him. He is strong’ (women would always rather admire and worship strength than be strong: the remark is as true as it is trite). ‘He thinks I know nothing about that likeness; and there is no maudlin sentimentality about him. He merely wishes to have my likeness for——; humph! a whim, no doubt; perhaps he will send it to his friends as a portrait of the strong-minded woman who manages the business. By the by, I wonder if he *has* any friends. But I do not care; surely my friend may have my likeness—and what a kind friend he is! So far as I can tell, he is absolutely unselfish. All the men I have ever known have been selfish. If I knew a man who was *not* selfish, I should

lo—— think an immensity of him ; that is, if I could ever get over my astonishment at the mere fact of his not being selfish.'

On arriving at home, Miss Healey did burn the remainder of the photographs. In after days Katharine used to look back upon this little episode as the one light and cheerful picture in a series of sad and sombre ones ; and it had in her mind much the same significance as a bunch of forget-me-nots growing in the shade beside a darkling pool. The flowers themselves would be unimportant ; but when they are the only colour in a dark picture, they rise to value ; for the dark days were at hand.

'Clouds in the evening sky more darkly gather,
And scattered wrecks lie thicker on the strand.'

The great and pitiless 'eternal silence' brooded ever all her affairs no doubt ; brooded,

'Like the day, a master o'er a slave.'

But its vastness was eclipsed by the din of the

'noisy years,' so that she knew not its import. She saw not the gathering gloom, heard not the first wailing sighs of the breeze in the distance — those sighs that forewarn a hurricane.





CHAPTER XIII.

‘Art thou she
Who stepped so lightly on the lea?
Persephone! Persephone!

The greater soul that draweth thee
Hath left his shadow plain to see
On thy fair face, Persephone!’ —*Persephone.*

TWO or three evenings later Ughtred Earnshaw sat reading; lost to the idea of time, even to the idea of supper-time, till the door of his room was opened, and Mrs. Holden, looking in, said—

‘Coom, lad! supper’s ready.’

He nodded, finished the page he was reading, thought over it a few minutes, and then, after a prolonged yawn, repaired to

the kitchen in answer to his landlady's summons.

She was not at the table; she was alone, and sat in a dispirited attitude over the fire.

It was not in Ughtred Earnshaw's nature to pass by the sad and grieved ones who happened to cross his path, and he had not that admirable equableness of mind that enables some people to ignore the sorrow of all but themselves. He had a genuine regard for his landlady, and bore her discursiveness and irrelevancies with patience and kindness. As for her, she was fond of him to weakness; she had one day called him Ughtred, and had then caught herself up with a kind of apology, to which he had replied—

‘Nay, call me that, Mrs. Holden. You are the only person in the world who does, except three, and they are far away.’

So with her the custom continued, but

Sara always treated him to 'Mr. Earnshaw' and her stiffest manners.

'You look out of sorts, Mrs. Holden; what is the matter?' he demanded.

'Eh, coom and get thi' supper, lad, and ne'er mind me. I'm a bit twiny, like, and out o' sorts.'

'Where's Sara?' he asked, for he knew Mrs. Holden well enough to connect any trouble that she might feel with her child.

'Hoo's gone oopstairs, and I tow'd her to get to bed. I cannot mak' out what ails t' lass. Hoo's that marred, hoo keeps fratchin' and threepin' me down o' this and that. And hoo sayn 'at hoo're yead wartches, and I'm puzzl't. It fair moithers me.'

'Oh, come and have some supper. She'll soon be all right again.'

'O' reet? Not hoo!'

There was a long pause, and at last Mrs. Holden said, in a trembling voice—

'Eh, lad, hast ne'er seen nowt amiss wi' her thisel'? I'm sore fleyed 'at all's not reet.'

Here Mrs. Holden burst into tears, weeping, not noisily, but bitterly.

'What do you mean?' asked Ughtred, startled with a sudden, indefinite fear.

'Hoo sayn as hoo winna stop here, to be put upon—*put upon*, and me givin' up mysel' to her as I dun. And hoo's gotten so much brass—I axed her where it coom fro', and hoo says, as saucy as owt, "I reckon I may do what I liken wi' my own spendin' brass wi'out axin' nobody." Hoo nobbut earns eighteen shillins a week, and hoo gives th' half on't to me. Now wheer does hoo get that other brass, lad? What dost think?'

She had laid her hand upon his arm, and her eyes spoke the fear that was in her heart. Poor woman! She had no one to go to, and she trusted in him.

He could not misunderstand her, and his face, too, looked blank for a moment as he gazed at her. Then he said, gently—

‘Dear Mrs. Holden, I don’t think you are right; I don’t indeed.’

“Eh! who knows?” sobbed the mother, wringing her hands, as children sometimes wring them. ‘Ever sin’ hoo coom home fro’ her aunt’s hoo’s bin i’ this way—only latterly hoo’s bin ten times worse. Eh! I reckon as there’s sorrow laid oop for some on us.’

‘I daresay there is. I’m certain of it. It is the only thing we can be certain of; but I don’t believe *that* trouble is laid up for you,’ he answered, speaking cheerfully, but unable to restrain a vague inward foreboding.

‘Life’s nowt nobbut trouble,’ moralised Mrs. Holden; ‘and if Sara goes wrong, I wonder what for I were iver born.’

Not an original reflection by any means. Jacob the patriarch and others, both mighty

and mean, before him and since, have had occasion to utter similar words. It is the common cry of a common humanity when its affairs get past its management.

Ughtred, touched with a most sincere pity, spoke as soon as he could; talked to poor Mrs. Holden; praised Sara; said he believed she was a good girl in spite of her queer ways; suggested that she might have met with some very attractive wooer at Haythorpe, of whom the memory disturbed her. Then he persuaded her to try and eat some supper; but it was truly a meal 'mingled with tears;' for now that her fears had been once aroused, they were loud and importunate.

'Now wilt do something else for me, lad?' said she after a while.

'Any mortal thing that I can, Mrs. Holden.'

'Read me yon Psalm about "green pastures and still waters." I mind me on't now, and it's so soothin' like.'

She produced a dusty Bible, and sat down

with folded toil-worn hands, and meek yet awe-struck face, to listen. He read that sweet and majestic poem to her, once and again, feeling as he did so a wave of deep inner emotion rise in his heart; for he remembered other scenes like this, and another mother to whom he had read, and whose blessing he had been wont to receive each night for a long time.

When he closed the book, and advised her to go to bed and rest, she rose, and, putting her hand upon his shoulder, said, 'I do believe thou'rt a good lad, Ughtred. Is thi' mother dead?'

'Yes.'

'Well, thou'll ne'er be no worse because thou's used me as if thou was my son. Good-neet.'

She stooped to where he sat looking up at her, kissed his forehead, and went upstairs. Half an hour later, when he went to resume his book, there was something like a tremor

on his lip as he sighed, and a bright mist before his eyes.

Mrs. Holden's outbreak of that night had its effect upon Earnshaw—in drawing his attention more particularly to Sara, whom he had scarcely seen lately, for she managed, in some unobtrusive, unnoticeable fashion, to keep out of the way—never to be visible save at the rarest intervals. But on the morning after his talk with her mother, he saw Sara at breakfast time: he was passing through the kitchen on his way to post a letter for the early mail.

Sara was alone, and was sitting listlessly at the table. She had come in from the early part of her day's work, and was waiting until breakfast was ready. Ughtred looked keenly at her, with more attentive and observant eyes than usual, and was thoroughly startled and upset with what he saw in the clear, morning light. She, who had always been so lovely, was beautiful

still in feature and form: the same clear and liquid eyes looked at you from beneath the delicate dark arch of eyebrow. But she was thin almost to emaciation. The graceful roundness of figure was gone; she stooped as if a heavy burden lay upon her shoulders. Her cheek-bones stood out, and underneath, where the rounded yet statuesque outline used to stand, were deep hollows. She looked tired and lifeless, and yet her face was clothed with an expression of devouring care—she was scarcely to be recognized—she was not the same beautiful light-hearted creature who opened the door to Ughtred on his first coming to Hamerton.

She did not speak as he passed her, after his usual 'good-morning,' till he paused and said kindly that he feared she was not well.

'Yea, I am; there's nowt ails me,' she answered; and it seemed to him that her very tone was changed.

‘You may say so,’ he replied, still kindly, ‘but your looks speak for you, Sara.’

‘I wish you’d mind your own business, and leave others to mind their’n,’ she replied sullenly, as she leaned back in her chair, folded her arms, and looked coldly at him.

Surprised and hurt, but pitiful, he said no more ; but went out, sorely puzzled. As he left the house Crier paused at the door, looked in, and hesitated. When Ughtred returned from the post, however, he was gone.

Sara, still seated at the table, looked as apathetic, as listless as ever, and deigned neither look nor movement. Ughtred went to his own room without speaking to her.

Sara came home again at half-past twelve, had her dinner, put her grey shawl over her head, and pinned it closely round her poor altered face : then she took her way again to the mill ; to the familiar place, to the

management of her three looms, to the close, oily, fluffy smell of the long 'shed,' where she had worked so long—first as a pretty little 'half-timer,' thinking more of her play-mates and games than of her looms; and then as full-timer, beginning to know hitherto unguessed troubles and pains.

She moved to and fro, adjusting her work and watching the shooting shuttle, without the least care or interest, but in a mechanical kind of way.

Butterworth came past on his daily round, stopped one of her looms, fingered the cloth superciliously, and said, 'Humph!' Then he passed on, and the girl nearest to her observed—

'Eh, lass, thou looks vary bad. Thou'd ought to be i' thi' bed, likker nor here.'

No reply. Her companion, however, had lately become used to seeing Sara Holden 'in the sulks,' and took no notice.

The afternoon wore on. The loud noise

of the machinery, and the incessant click-click that mingled with it, acted as a sort of soporific to Sara's nerves: she worked on, stolid, but wretched.

'Eh, sitha! yon's t' measter hissel, and a lass wi' him,' ejaculated her companion, and Sara, with a start, looked up.

Yes, there was Wilfrid Healey, looking, as usual, proudest of the proud, and apparently doing the honours of his mill to the lady with him, Thorgerd Meredith. He took her hand to guide her down the alley between two rows of looms, and they passed close, close to Sara Holden, almost touching her. She smelt the faint, subtle perfume that lingered about Thorgerd's raiment, and saw the sweet face, with its look of surprise, curiosity, and interest. Then Wilfrid stooped his head towards her, trying to make her hear; he never looked once to right or left, but only at her; and she, as she met his eyes and smile, blushed. She shook her head, she

had not heard what he said ; but what of that ? If Sara Holden had read *Shirley*, she might have thought of Robert Moore's words to Caroline—' Stoop closer, Lina ; I care more for the whisper than the words.'

They swept past, like a breath of south wind, and went down the alley, and out at another door into the beaming-room. Sara gazed stupidly after them for a short time, and then down at the blue mark called the ' weaver's welcome,' which was just rolling from the warp.

Her companion cried out—

' Eh, mind out, Sara ! There'll be a fault i' yon piece.'

Then the room swam round her ; the machinery seemed to make one gigantic roar, and come crashing down upon her. With a faint cry she fell, and her neighbour caught her just in time to save her from being caught up by the machinery. Saved her, it may be—

' But death will never come when needs require.'

When she recovered from her faint, she found herself in the office with a woman and the overlooker, who told her she must go home, and asked if she could walk. She assented, and, throwing her shawl over her head, left the office, and walked slowly down the village in the direction of home. Heart-sick, she wished for nothing so much as solitude. Fate is sometimes propitious; when she tried the door she found it locked. Her mother, then, was out. She opened the door with her own key, and went into the kitchen.

Before she entered, it had been, though empty, the picture of comfort. A splendid fire—a Lancashire fire—blazed warmly; the kettle gently sang on the bar, the room was ‘redd up’ for the day, and everything was in perfect order and repose. But after that hopeless-looking figure had entered, the aspect of things was changed. She stood still for awhile in the middle of the room, with eyes half closed and head downcast; her shawl slipped

from about her, and fell upon the floor. The pathos and desolation of the drooping figure and aimless attitude were intense. She was, however, still faint, and presently sat down in a rocking chair by the hearth, and putting her hand within the bosom of her dress, she drew forth a ribbon, to which hung something that caught the light of the fire for a moment, and flashed it back.

Her face changed, indeed, as she looked upon it. It was a wedding ring, thick and bright, and shining as when first bought,—a wedding ring, and yet it was as well one of those crosses with which life is 'signed on every side.'

The sight of it roused within her memories too intensely painful ; she let it fall, and, covering her face with her hands, rocked to and fro, sobbing. 'I canna bide it much longer,' she whispered between her sobs. 'It is na' fair. I said I'd bear all, but I never thowt o' this ; and he said he'd be true to me. Oh, me!'

Then, with a sudden change from agony to indignation—‘And I won’t bear it; no, I *won’t*. I’ll have what’s reet; I won’t be threeped down and treated so, and——’

She hastily thrust away the ring as footsteps outside paused, and the pause was followed by a knock.

‘Come in!’ cried Sara, not at all prepared for the apparition which followed the summons—Crier. She gave him no greeting, nor did he speak to her, but stood still, looking at her. His face was ashen white, and full of fear, misery, and desperation.

He said at last, in a constrained tone, ‘Sara!’

‘Well,’ she answered, apathetically. All her former dread of him seemed to have vanished. Some greater misery, some more desperate and overmastering fear, effectually excluded fear of *him*.

‘I’ve never been near you, nor troubled you for a long time, Sara, but I can bear this

no longer. I've watched you, if I've never spoken to you; you are miserable; you are wretched—Sara, you are breaking your heart.'

'What's that to thee?'

'It's the whole world, and you know it very well. I've no happiness while you are miserable——'

'Then you'll be as wretched as you deserve,' she answered, with a harsh laugh.

'God knows I do deserve to be wretched, but not as wretched as this, Sara. God made both you and me and——'

There was a long pause, during which Sara took no notice of him, and Crier at length exclaimed in a voice of intense anguish—

'Oh, I don't believe in God! I don't believe He is good; if He were good, we should not be so miserable!'

'Hast ne'er found out *that* afore?' said Sara, with a concentrated scorn that sat strangely upon her sad and subdued manner of every day. And she laughed again.

Crier watched her for a few minutes, and his face darkened; then he said, his voice growing almost into a cry—

‘It’s as I said. You have got to love some one else. You are sorrowing for some other man. Does he neglect you? Has he been false to you? Does he make you miserable? Sara! speak, and I’ll put a stop to it—and to him too.’

She did not answer him, but rocked slowly to and fro, smiling bitterly.

‘I would have given all my life to making you happy,’ he went on deliberately; ‘but he—you need not deny it, Sara—I don’t know who it is, but I know that some one you love makes you miserable, and that he does not care a straw *how* miserable he makes you.’

She winced, but still preserved silence.

‘I’ll have my revenge on him. I’ll make him suffer for it. I have had to suffer; so shall he. A false hound! to steal away another man’s treasure, and then fling it aside——’

Sara started up, and, pointing to the door, said—

‘Be off, wi’ your lies! When I say as how any one’s flung me off, it’ll be time enough for thee to come speerin’ about. Thou’rt a fool, and always were.’

‘Tell me who he is,’ he persisted, grasping her arm.

‘’Tain’t nobody. Thou’rt far too fond o’ mindin’ other folks’ business. Be off, I say, or I’ll have to thrutch thee out.’

He turned, saying as he went, ‘Ay, but I’ll punish him, for my sake as well as thine, Sara.’

Small things may become dangerous when animated with one concentrated feeling. Even such a worm as Abraham Crier may be transformed into a formidable instrument for revenge. Nemesis has assumed ere now the shape of meaner things than even a Local Ranting Preacher.

Meanwhile Sara had returned to her rocking

chair by the fire, and to her interrupted thoughts, without giving even a passing moment to the contemplation of Mr. Crier's visit. In the great ocean of her misery his ravings were but as a drop—were less than a drop.

She sat there, Sara Holden, living over again the brief days when she had been not Sara Holden, but an inexpressibly happy creature—when she had been lifted out of existence into *life*. Since when she had died again—had been relegated to existence, with the shadow of that other time for ever brooding over her, for ever tormenting her: having been taught by a perilous experiment that she had a heart and soul, she was now to live on as if she had never proved that knowledge, with only the memory of what had happened. Well, she did as women always do in such a case, fed upon those memories and her own heart.

She was even now passionately recalling her short span of troubled bliss. She had memories of moments full of incredible,

delirious joy, when she had listened to a deep voice, which softened to whispers in speaking to her—in speaking words which she believed in spite of reason, in spite of probability. Kisses, all the sweeter because he who gave them said they must not be spoken of—just then—these lay in her memory. Assurances of love unalterable, and for her alone, rang again in her ears—words spoken by one who, to her inexperienced young eyes, stood upon so lofty a height, was raised so far above her head, that whatever he said or did must be right, or why should he be placed so high? And how could one so grand and powerful trouble himself to deceive anything so feeble and simple as she?

Then one dazzling summer morning, when she had stolen away from her aunt's house in sunny, hawthorn-scented Haythorpe, under pretence of some village excursion, and had gone to church, a small, cool, quaint old church, where her stately love had met her, and where

she had heard and spoken words of a marriage service, without in the least knowing the significance of the thing she was doing, but trembling with fear as much as with love. How she had come out with the ring placed on her hand ; how, when that voice whispered 'Wife,' her heart had given a great leap—a throb of 'joy that was almost pain,' and of the utmost, saddest foreboding at the same time. How he had asked her not to tell—to trust him for a time—and had taken her hand to draw off the ring. She had shuddered at the omen, though he had smiled and kissed her as he spoke ; and she had removed it herself, and worn it concealed ever since, hiding what is to some women their proudest jewel, her wedding ring. How she had hastened to promise unquestioning obedience, sorry that he forbade her to let all the world know her joy, but sure that he must mean aright, saying that she was content to do what he chose, even while her sweet, dark eyes filled with troubled

tears at his prohibition. That day and other days had passed, till the end of her stay in Haythorpe. Then they had left together, and had passed some little time in London, after which she had been sent home, with words of regret and with consoling kisses, no doubt, but—sent home—sent to the old life with the old caution,—‘Have nothing to do with any one; keep quite to yourself; and if you love me, Sara, trust me and keep our secret. I must seem as if I did not know you, and you must never appear to know me.’

‘Never, never?’ she had asked, fearfully.
‘Oh, it’s so hard; must I never see you?’

‘You shall see me, and in the end it shall all be right, *if you will only wait.*’

She had promised, of course, and she had waited, while her heart slowly broke and fainted within her because he simulated *his* indifference so well; it looked so very like the real thing. Yet she had indulged at first in occasional dreams of how some day her fate

would be changed, when she would be a lady, and her former companions would look with envy and wonder upon her, and would say that she was so beautiful that a rich gentleman chose her from amongst all his acquaintance to be his wife, and his life's companion. Poor fond child ! If she had but been a little more acquainted with evil, she might perhaps have escaped better, with the same broken heart, haply, but without having given everything she possessed in return for the honour of having that heart broken by Wilfrid Healey.

Fair visions ! Remembrances too passionately sweet ! But never to be realized the visions ; the remembrances, doomed ever to be remembrances, and nothing more !—

‘ Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned,
On lips that are for others : deep as love—
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret—
O Death in Life ! The days that are no more ! ’

So, in ruder words, Sara was complaining within her heart.

At last she started up resolving—

‘I can’t bear it. I’ll wait a little—just a little, and then I must speak—ay, I must, or I shall go mad——; and perhaps, after all, he may forgive me——; surely, if he loves me, he will.’

Exhausted with her mental sufferings, she crept upstairs and lay down on her bed; but her head ached agonizingly, and she was tormented with the ceaseless repetition of scenes she had passed through before. Memory brought them before her with unerring accuracy, for they had been conned and brooded over thousands of times before, both gladly and sadly. Grief and indignation coloured them with their most vivid tints. Her pulse was beating wildly, and her blood at fever heat, when her mother came in, and learnt, with no small alarm, of her daughter’s illness and return home.



CHAPTER XIV.

'The goddess Calamity is delicate, and . . . her feet are tender—
"Her feet are soft," he says ; "for she treads not upon the ground,
but makes her path upon the heads of men."'

—SHELLEY'S *Banquet of Plato*.



IS this true, Louis, about Wilfrid
being engaged to that girl ?'

So demanded Mrs. Kay one
morning of her son, about ten days after that
afternoon on which Sara Holden had sig-
nalized herself by fainting and other things.

'If not, he ought to be,' said Louis, 'for
he has been spooning with her to a most
tremendous extent.'

'So I should fancy ; he does most things
thoroughly. If he *should* reform, it would
be no half-and-half measure. Do you think

there is *any* prospect of his mending, Louis?’

‘Since his flirtation with Miss Meredith, he has been exemplary in all respects,’ returned her son, rather indifferently.

‘If I could live to see him happily married, with children brought up in a Christian manner, how glad I should be!’ sighed Mrs. Kay.

‘I am sure I hope you will be preserved to that desirable period, *madre mia*; but your days will indeed be long in the land in that case; you would have to live many hundred years.’

‘Then you don’t believe in his turning out a respectable member of society?’

‘Under given circumstances he might, but those circumstances will never come to pass.’

‘He might be such a fine fellow!’ she lamented. ‘I scold Katharine for giving way to him as she does, but, upon my word, I am not so much surprised at it after I have been talking to him for five minutes.’

‘Katharine shall not sacrifice herself to him for a day after she is my wife,’ said Louis, frowningly.

‘Don’t tell her so beforehand, or she will not have you.’

‘Oh! I shall not alarm her,’ laughed he.

‘I would not talk so largely of what Katharine shall do and shall not do when you marry her,’ continued Mrs. Kay. ‘Your poor dear father used to do just the same thing: he said he would allow his wife to do this, and forbid her to do that, and so on, when he was married; but afterwards he seemed to forget it, somehow. I should say that Katharine’s will is quite as strong as mine, if not stronger.’

‘Perhaps mine is stronger than either,’ said Louis, composedly.

‘Sometimes, Louis, you make me wonder what you mean. Stronger than either—I don’t see what that has to do with it.’

‘And I don’t see the use of talking about

shall and shall not in such a vague, unmeaning way. Shall and must are words not to be lightly said. For my part, I use them seldom, and mean them when I do use them.'

'Are you going to Healey to-night?'

'Yes.'

'All the village is talking about this engagement, if it is an engagement. Mrs. Ormerod wonders where they will be married; she is sure that any consecrated building would fall down upon them and crush them to death.'

'The old hag!' muttered her son, darkly.

'Of course what she says is all rubbish,' said Mrs. Kay; 'but, Louis, that girl would be the saving of him; and I must say that, if it is to be, I wish it were well over. I cannot imagine Wilfrid settling down like other men. I should be nervous the whole of the engagement and during the ceremony, lest some first wife should start up and accuse him of attempting bigamy.'

‘What rubbish!’ said Louis, looking up quickly, and speaking with less than the courtesy he always displayed to his mother. ‘How can you, mother, say such things? As if a man would attempt such a very *mauvaise plaisanterie* with Miss Meredith. She is a young lady; his equal in every respect.’

‘Well, well, dear, I was only joking,’ she replied, not making any inconvenient strictures upon the *morale* of his remark.

‘So I should suppose,’ said he, leaving the room.

‘How thankful Katharine Healey ought to be,’ reflected Mrs. Kay, ‘when she contrasts her lover with her brother!’

The confidence of mothers in the merits of their offspring is proverbial.

The party of four in the drawing-room at Healey that night looked happy, if not united. They certainly were not united, for

Louis and Katharine were at the piano at one end of the room, and Wilfrid and Thorgerd in conversation at the fireside.

‘O Death, that makest Life so sweet !
O Fear, with mirth before thy feet !
What have ye yet in store for us,
The conquerors, the glorious !’

So sang Louis softly, and Katharine said—

‘How easy it would be to transpose that, Louis, and say, “Oh Life, that makest Death so sweet !” And some people might say it was more correct than the other.’

‘Of course there are people with morbid and diseased imaginations in all parts of the world,’ said Louis, sceptically.

‘Well, it makes a pretty song ; one never needs to believe these songs. Will you finish it for me ?’

He continued, and Katharine sat listening, more than contented.

‘Do you remember the night you arrived here, Thorgerd ?’ said Wilfrid.

‘I do, indeed !’

‘I came to the door, and found you sitting alone in this waste of a room while Katharine was still adorning. You looked as if you had been wandering about for a long time homeless, and had at last fluttered down into this desolate place, and made it home by your mere presence.’

Thorgerd did not speak, but, meeting his glance, her own eyes filled and sank.

‘You were in so deep a reverie that I had quite a long look at you. I don’t think you would have known if I had quietly gone away again. Then I think I stamped heavily on the floor, or made some unearthly noise to attract your attention, didn’t I?’

‘I do not know ; I looked up, and—you were there!’

‘I should very much like to know what you were thinking of at that moment. You were giving your most serious attention to *something*, and almost frowning. May I not know what caused the frown?’

'You!' she answered, laughing rather constrainedly.

'I!' said he, his eyes filling with a look of the most intense pleasure for a moment. 'I, Miss Meredith, you don't mean it? How?'

'I was wondering what you were like. Katharine had described you so often,' said Thorgerd, smiling.

'Flatteringly?'

'That is as you think. You were so clever, and so handsome, she said; so that I expected to find you rather disagreeable than otherwise, and wondered whether you would treat me *en grand seigneur*, or——'

'Or what? You know your imagination is vivid, for you said that evening that you were so "stupid about these things," which showed your great discernment at once.'

She looked up, hesitating whether to laugh, for she saw him smiling with amusement.

'Ah, you are laughing at me!' said she at last, seeing his smile become more decided.

'I believe I was, but it is your own fault.' Then after a pause, 'Will you own that after all I was not so intensely disagreeable as my judicious sister had represented me?'

'Did I say you were disagreeable?'

And so on, *ad infinitum*; and the two found so much entertainment from this rather bald class of conversation, that neither noticed the servant who came in and went to speak to Katharine.

Her mistress followed her from the room, and closed the door.

'There's a young person at the kitchen door 'm, wanting to see master. I've told her master never sees any one after dinner unless he gives orders beforehand; but she won't go away, and I thought I had better tell you. I didn't like to ask master.'

'Did she give her name, or say what she wanted?' asked Katharine, having in her mind's eye the numberless complaints always being brought to herself or Wilfrid by their hands and tenants, and expecting a long tale

about 'our Mary Alice,' or a circumlocutory request that 'Wilfrid would see as roof was mended,' or 'chimney built oop,' etc.

'No, 'm, she wouldn't give her name; and with me being a stranger, I don't know her; but she seems like a factory hand.'

'Bring her to my sitting-room,' said Katharine, taking her own way there. She turned up the gas, which had been lowered, gave a poke to the fire, which had sunk in the grate, and she shivered a little; for after the drawing-room this empty chamber felt chilly. Then, turning to the fire, she put one hand on the mantel-piece, and one foot on the fender, and stood still, thinking more of Louis' beautiful voice than of the 'young person at the kitchen door,' who was so importunate to 'see master.' The footsteps of two people along the passage, then the door was thrown open, and some one entered. The servant retired, and Katharine turned to scan her visitor.

It was Sara Holden, pallid, haggard, and wasted with misery, the ghost of her former self. Her appearance gave a terrible shock to Katharine, who had not seen her for many weeks.

‘Sara! What brings you here? My poor girl, you look very ill. What ails you?’

‘It won’t take so long to tell my business,’ said Sara, in a hopeless kind of voice. ‘I’ve suffered for a long time, and been quiet, but I can’t bear it no more. I must know summat, one way or another.’

After a pause, she went on—

‘I’ve heard say over and over again, this last week or two, as the master’s bound to be wed—as he’s a courtin’, choosehow.’

‘Well?’

She spoke calmly, but a great fear seized her; the worst fear. She had never known anything of Wilfrid to make her think him likely to be honourable in such a case, and she did but reason from the known to the unknown.

‘Is it true?’

Sara spoke almost without eagerness, as if she were sure what the answer would be, and merely waited it as a matter of form.

Katharine, feeling all her hopes on the subject of her brother's future extinguished in an instant, said, with more than her usual blunt directness,

‘Suppose he is—what is that to you?’

There was a pause, a terrible pause, during which Katharine looked at the white face, with its pinched expression of suffering, its wreck of beauty, its indescribable mingling of sadness, weariness, and hopelessness. Then Sara raised her eyes, and answered—

‘I am his wife.’

‘His wife!’ echoed Katharine, and then stopped.

Deep - rooted in Katharine Healey's heart was a profound conviction of right and wrong, justice and injustice. She never or seldom *spoke* of her love for the one and her hatred

for the other ; but she held very fast to this short, uncomplex creed—she believed in the eternal nature of right and justice with greater fervour and singleness than most people, perhaps chiefly because she believed in so very little beside. She did not herself know how devoutly she believed in them : she would probably have denied it if put to the question, and would have made some sceptical, sneering remark as to the potency of wrong and the impotency of right here below—but let it come to actions, ‘by their fruit ye shall know them.’

Therefore, after Sara’s words—after the first moment of stunned disbelief—her sense of the right came to her again, clear and strong.

Sara Wilfrid’s wife ! Then farewell every hope for his future. *This* wife would never for a second influence him for good, but negatively she might influence him immensely—for evil. He would never, by the thought

of her, or for her sake, or out of respect for her, be restrained from one wrong action, one sinful habit, one reckless impiety. She could not elevate him actually, but she would harm him, and lower him negatively.

All this and more flashed through Katharine's mind like lightning, after the first fear had been removed by Sara's words. Then arose the feeling, prompted urgently by justice, mercy, and truth,—was it not better that Sara should be his wife, however despised, than that she should be yet Sara Holden, dishonoured, ruined, disgraced? Yes, replied the same voices within her; and when she spoke it was to their dictation.

‘When were you married to him, and where?’

‘It were at Haythorpe, in ——shire, in July.’

Distinctly every circumstance rose to Katharine's mind. Wilfrid's absence at some unknown place, whose name she had never

yet learnt; how, in answer to her own questions, Ughtred Earnshaw had told her of Sara Holden's being away at the same time; and how he had said, with a smile, that the girl had 'gone to see the world.'

'Oh, Sara! What made you marry him?'

'He said he loved me: he told me I were th' only one he could ever care for, and he asked me if I cared for him? How could I help? You are his sister—they say he's unkind to you, and yet you love him. What were *I* to do? When he said he loved me, I thought at first I were mad to think o' such a thing. And so I were—ay, so I were.'

'You were indeed, child! You were very mad. But, Sara, are you sure you are married to him? I hope you are—but are you sure? There are such things as false marriages, you know.'

'Nay, I'm wed to him; for certain sure I am. And yon parson as were here i' th'

summer wi' Mrs. Kay of Stanlaw—he were here at th' time, but we're wed at his church, and 'twere his curit as wed us.'

'Mr. Gamaliel!' cried Katharine.

'Ay.'

'Good heavens!'

'Th' master said as if I really loved him I'd keep our wedding a secret, and I were only to' proud to do whatever he told me. And if he hadna done this, I'd have died afore I'd have let on—ay, whatever had happened—if my mother had turned me out o' doors.'

Katharine looked keenly at her, and the girl hung her head, with a burning blush.

'But,' went on Sara, in a voice that pierced her listener's heart, 'when I seen him wi' my own eyes a-coortin' yon other lass, and looking on her fair as if hoo were the vary light of his een, and when I heerd tell on all sides as he were bound to wed her, I couldna' keep silence no longer. But my heart is broke.'

With every word spoken by Sara, Katharine was more strongly led to pity and compassionate her. The thing was awful, was piteous, was deplorable. If Sara's heart were broken, how about Thorgerd's? Yet every instant it became clearer to her that only one course was open to her—only one that she might honestly pursue.

'Oh, if you had told me of this long ago,' she said. 'It would have saved some very dreadful suffering, not only to yourself, but to others.'

'I did as he told me as long as I could.'

'Has he ever seen you since you both came home?'

'Only about twice, and I told him as folks must soon know as I was—I was——oh, Miss Healey!'

Katharine drew her to her bosom, and kissed her streaming face and sobbing lips. For herself she could not weep; her tears seemed dried at their source.

‘You told him *that*?’ said she, ‘and what did he say?’

‘He said, “Trust to me,” and I trusted.’

‘Oh, my child, you should never trust in men; there is no help in them. Well, Sara, you must come with me and see him.’

‘Nay!’ cried Sara, shrinking away with a terrified face. ‘Nay, I durstn’t. Indeed I durstn’t. He’ll be angry. I can’t go.’

‘Trust to me. No harm will happen to you. Come.’ And she held forth her hand.

Taking her shawl from her head as if it stifled her, and pushing the hair from her temples, Sara followed whither she was led. Katharine did not pause. A certain hardness had come over her; to mince matters, or to choose time and place for the disclosure, never occurred to her. To pause was only to prolong the cheat which had already been going on too long. She walked into the drawing-room, followed by Sara. What they saw was never, during

life, forgotten by either woman. A little, ordinary, every-day scene, turned into a thrilling dramatic situation by the circumstances, as the hour of death may make a poor life sublime.

Louis was still at the piano, and was singing the quaint words of Orlando Gibbons' sweet madrigal, 'The Dying Swan.' Ridiculous old words, meted to a very sweet melody. He sang—

'Farewell, all joys, O death, come, close mine eyes !
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise !'

Wilfrid and Thorgerd had drawn near, and were laughing at the words, and Louis, when he had finished, turned and sang again in a low voice—

'More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise !'

'Wilfrid !' said Katharine, constrainedly, almost too excited to speak.

The trio turned, and at the sight of Wilfrid Sara made a step forward, and stretched out

her hands towards him, gazing at him, as if she would compel his pity by her pleading, imploring eyes. He suddenly crimsoned, and he too came forward and confronted her. So they stood in the centre, and the others were silent.

Wilfrid at last said, in a voice of intense though suppressed savageness,

‘What do *you* want?’

‘You need hardly ask,’ said Katharine, in a low yet vibrating voice; and then, becoming suddenly conscious of Thorgerd’s presence by the sound of surprise and fear which the latter uttered, she went up to her, and, looking with tearless eyes into her face, said, in a voice of intense anguish—

‘Thorgerd, that is his wife. I never knew, never, till ten minutes ago.’

At the words, ‘That is his wife,’ Wilfrid uttered a kind of imprecation, and then said—

‘I’ll be damned if she is!’

‘Oh!’ sobbed Sara, in echo to his words.

She looked round with desperate appealing eyes, which fell at length upon Louis Kay, who had been darkly watching the scene.

Sara turned, and, pointing to Louis, said, 'I am his wife. Mr. Kay there knows it: He can't say nay.'

'*Louis!*' exclaimed Katharine, walking up to him, and speaking in an excited tone unusual to her; 'is this true? Is that my brother's wife? Is she Sara Healey, or is she not?'

A pause, during which Wilfrid walked to the fire-place, and stood, kicking the fender savagely with one heel, regarding Thorgerd all the time. Towards Sara he never once looked. Then Louis said, slowly, reluctantly, and as if the words were wrung from him—

'Yes, she is Sara Healey; she is his wife.'

'She may call herself what she likes,' said Wilfrid, sullenly. 'She may send the bell-man round, proclaiming it, if she chooses. If fifty bishops and twenty thousand parsons

said she was my wife, I don't care, for' (he raised his hand, and his very lips went white) 'I'll never own her, by ——! never, as long as I live; *never!*'

'What wrong have I done you? What for did you marry me?' panted Sara, flashing out into passion for a second.

He laughed contemptuously.

'Because I was a fool—and to punish another fool. And I'm sorry I did it now.'

Sara's head drooped, and she turned to the door without a word. It was enough: her heart, she thought, had been broken before, but it could feel, could yet experience anguish unspeakable.

Katharine sprang after her. At that moment no 'reasoning faculty' prompted her deeds. What she did, she did from instinct—or inspiration.

'Stop an instant,' said she, grasping Sara's hand. 'Wilfrid, do you mean what you said? Are you a perfect dastard? Do you

utterly refuse to own your *wife*? Do you cast her off entirely?’

‘*That* I do, and always shall.’

‘But I do not. I shall own her as my sister, and treat her as your wife.’

‘You can if you like, but it will not be in my house. If you choose to make a fool of yourself by doing so, you must go elsewhere to do it. If you take her part, you say good-bye to me, for I shall wash my hands of you.’

Katharine stood quite still for a few moments—everything and every person forgotten in the horror of hearing these words. Then, going to him, she attempted to take his hand; but he wrenched it away, and looked into her face with dreadful resolution. In tones that tried in vain to be incredulous, she cried—

‘Wilfrid, you do not mean that? Wash your hands of *me*! Say you do not mean it? For pity’s sake say you do not really mean it?’

‘Not I!’ he answered, with a short laugh. Then, raising his voice, and bending his defiant gaze on one and all his hearers, he added, ‘Look here! Here’s all about it. Let that—person go away, and you stay where you are, and hold your tongue, and I’ll say no more to you about it; but this rot about sisters and wives I won’t stand. If you mean to abide by *that*, you leave this house to-night, this very hour. I’ve said it; and I’ll stick to it.’

‘I must do what is right and just,’ said Katharine, feeling dull and cold, and conscious of a desperate unheroic grief that justice and right should bid her leave Wilfrid rather than stay with him.

‘Pshaw!’ was his answer.

Perhaps his wife and his sister had cause sufficient to turn and curse him by their gods. As a matter of fact they did no such thing. Katharine’s very heart-strings were bleeding. She was going with Sara because

something—*what*, she knew not—told her it was right to do so. She felt, however, none of the exalted calm of conscious virtue, but a horrible, ignoble, desperate longing to see one look of relenting upon Wilfrid's face—to hear one word of compromise from his lips. None came; instead, he said curtly, 'Settle for yourselves;' and then, going up to Thorgerd, spoke to her in a low voice. She bowed her head in silence, after which Wilfrid, turning on his heel, went out of the room, and they heard his footstep on the tiles of the hall, on his way to his own rooms.

There was a moment's silence, and then—

'Thorgerd,' said Katharine, 'you have heard it all. I must go; will you come with me?'

'Yes.'

Louis then came forward.

'You will go to Stanlaw, Katharine, and to my mother?'

She had forgotten him utterly ; but when he spoke, and made her conscious of his presence again, she shuddered from head to foot. Had she been alone, she would have spent the night on a doorstep rather than cross his threshold ; but there was Thorgerd ; she therefore assented to his proposition.

‘Very well ; but will you go and prepare Mrs. Kay for our arrival, as I shall first go home with Sara ?’

He was glad, thankful to go, and departed without a word.

Katharine and Thorgerd were soon ready. Sara neither spoke nor moved, and Katharine put her shawl once more over her head, and took her hand in hers. Even now—even in this awful moment, she began to realize that the being whose part she had taken was very utterly, and very entirely self-helpless.

‘We shall not return,’ said Katharine to the servant who attended them to the

carriage. Then the door was closed — *she was shut out in the cold.* In such wise she left the house where she had been born, and in which she had spent her life.





CHAPTER XV.

'Exiles are in the world—wherefore not I?'—MRS. BROWNING.

KATHARINE had told the coachman to stop at Mrs. Holden's, and as they approached she said to Thorgerd—

'You will not mind waiting for a few minutes, Thorgerd?'

'Oh, no,' she answered mechanically, as she had spoken and moved ever since Sara's entrance upon the scene.

Katharine held Sara's hand as they stood together at her mother's door. The girl

seemed to have collapsed, and only gave a faint shiver now and then.

Mrs. Holden opened the door and peered curiously out.

‘It is I, Katharine Healey ; I have brought Sara home.’

‘Miss Healey ! Coom in, Miss, pray !’ and she flung wide open the door to admit them.

They entered : in the middle of the room stood Ughtred, who had been engaged in trying to calm his landlady’s fears with respect to her daughter ; for Sara had gone out immediately after tea, and had lingered long about the Healey gate, not daring to enter, till a sudden, desperate, burning sense of wrong had given her courage, and she had gone through with her errand.

Words of scolding for her child, of politeness to the lady, of questioning for all, were upon Mrs. Holden’s lips, but they all died away before the faces that met her view.

'I hope nowt's amiss,' she began, looking doubtfully and timidly from the one to the other.

'A great deal is amiss,' replied Katharine.

'Mrs. Holden, your daughter came to tell us what none of us ever guessed—that she is my brother's wife. She has been married to him since July.'

'Oh my!' observed Mrs. Holden, stunned and fearful.

'It is a very sad business,' added Katharine, steadily.

Ughtred at this point moved towards his own room, but Katharine, with a gesture, bade him remain. She had a strange sense of help in the mere fact of his presence; she felt as though, if he went away, every outward sign of human sympathy would be cut off from her, and she left alone, upon a lofty, isolated pinnacle of shame and misery.

'He will not own her,' went on Katharine, doing her bitter duty as briefly, as unemotionally as she could.

‘Does he say hoo’s *not* his wife?’ demanded Mrs. Holden, fiercely.

‘No: he does not say so, for she *is* his wife. But he will not treat her as such. He repents that he married her. I have said that I shall take her part, and’ (she turned, almost without knowing it, towards Ughtred, and addressed the last words to him) ‘he has—sent me away—he has turned me out of his house; he will not own me as his sister if I own her as his wife.’

‘My poor lass!’ said the mother, turning to Sara, who, with a deep sob, flung herself into her arms; but Katharine Healey had no mother, and now she had no home.

She stood, looking on for a moment as Sara and her mother stood thus clasped together, and Ughtred Earnshaw saw that her mouth twitched, and she hastily drew her hand across it. He made an involuntary step forward; Katharine looked at him: their eyes met, and she gave the wannest, most heart-breaking

smile he had ever seen. Again her hand touched her lips, as if to steady them. Then, as if she could bear to look at them no longer, she touched Mrs. Holden's arm, and said—

‘I must go now, Mrs. Holden, but keep Sara at home. I will see you again to-morrow.’

Rousing herself, Mrs. Holden replied, ‘Ay, I’st mind what yo sayn; but I’m fair moithered like just now.’

‘Sara,’ said Katharine, ‘good-night. I am sorry for you, though I fear you think I am not. But—I am like your mother. I do not understand it yet.’

Sara’s lips moved, but she seemed to have fallen into a trance, and took no notice of what was passing around her.

Katharine, with a deep sigh, turned to go, and Ughtred sprang forward to open the door for her. She moved mechanically towards it, but a film rose between her eyes and outward objects. She did not see where she was going, and she put out her hand blindly, stretching

out for some possible support—not expecting to find any, but compelled by need to appeal for it; and her tall figure swayed unsteadily.

It is perhaps good to stand alone; but I notice that the fewer props we poor, weak creatures have, the less upright is our attitude apt to be; and so poor Katharine, feeling herself very utterly and very dreadfully alone, walked unsteadily, and stretched out her hands for help.

Another hand took hers, and by its strong and steady clasp seemed to bid her rely upon it, for it would uphold her.

She put her hand within Ughtred's arm, and leaned upon him, standing still for a moment, and a wave of wonder mingled with conviction passed across her mind.

Wilfrid, Louis, her two nearest and dearest—what were they? The one had discarded her because, after years of devotion, she had crossed his will in a matter in which she was right and he was wrong; the other

had so deceived her that she even yet scarce understood the magnitude of the cheat, and was only conscious of a bruised, battered, punished feeling—as if she had stood within a fair, nobly-proportioned church, whose roof had fallen upon her, and crushed her shapeless. She felt that now she would rather be guided by the most erratic will-o'-the-wisp than ever put faith or trust in Louis Kay again.

Beyond that was Thorgerd, whom she had unconsciously led to meet her fate and her sorrow. Amid all her wealth, all her station, was it come to this—that her only friend was a poor and unpowerful man like Ughtred Earnshaw? He, at any rate, knew the worst—knew that she was on the losing side, and—came to help her in her need.

This passed confusedly through her mind as they went from the kitchen to the pavement, she still leaning upon his arm. She turned towards him, saying—

‘I may not see you again for a long time, Mr. Earnshaw, but I’ll thank you now. You have been a friend to me when those I most trusted and believed in were cheating me,—and smiling into my face as they did it.’

A bitter pause. ‘I would say you will never suffer for your goodness, but for what I’ve seen this night, which does not look as if the right always triumphed, does it? But I might have known that.’

‘You shall not thank me and dismiss me, as if I could never be of any more use to you,’ said he, earnestly. ‘Every day I shall watch for an opportunity to serve you; and if you would try to remember that though I am not powerful, I am *ready*—— Oh, Miss Healey, will you remember that?’

‘I have not so many friends that I am likely to forget it,’ she answered, faintly.

He handed her into the carriage, and as it drove away to Stanlaw he murmured, looking after it—

'Can it be wrong of me? I believe I should be glad if I knew she had no one in the whole world but me to appeal to, for then *she would be obliged to come to me.*'





CHAPTER XVI.

Adam.—Mark Lucifer. He changes awfully.

Eve.—It seems as if he looked from grief to God,
And could not see Him.

Luc.—I cry—cry—dashing out the hands of wail
On each side, to meet anguish everywhere,
And to attest it in the ecstasy
And exaltation of a woe sustained,
Because provoked and chosen.

—*A Drama of Exile.*



ON their arrival at Stanlaw, Katharine had requested that she and Thorgerd might have the same room, and they had retired to it directly.

They had not seen Louis. Mrs. Kay had kissed Katharine's cold and unresponsive cheek, and had said—

‘This is your home, Katharine, and the

home of your friends, whenever and for as long as you will.'

'When you know all,' thought Katharine, 'you will feel glad that I do not remind you of that promise.'

When she and Thorgerd were alone together, and had sat in silence for a few minutes, they looked at each other, venturing for the first time to meet one another's eyes. Each read pretty much her own story in the other's face, written there in clear yet horrible characters—despair, bewilderment, and a desperate endeavour not to contemplate the future, but to flee away from it. The past was almost equally bitter, and the intolerable present was as yet hardly understood by either. Suddenly, while Thorgerd, after that one blank look of misery, sat still and speechless, Katharine, as if some idea smote and tortured her, started up and said—

'Thorgerd, you do not speak. It is because you cannot find words in which to tell

me how you detest me, for having led you where you have suffered so much. You are thinking that before you knew me you were happy, and that since you have known me you have——; oh, what have you *not* been wronged in? But do not be afraid of hurting me by saying so. I am quite sure now that I have been cursed from my very birth; and when I am not suffering myself, I am causing others to suffer. It has always been thus. I ought to have been stifled before I had time to breathe.'

Her manner was excited, and strangely unlike her unimpassioned every-day one. In very truth she hardly knew what she was saying; her trouble had almost driven her mad.

Thorgerd turned aside, covered her face with her hands, and spoke not; and then Katharine, standing still, felt such a storm of agony sweep over her heart and soul, as she had never before even conceived;

for hitherto her sufferings had been more of endurance and foreboding than of active racking pain. Her heart and her spirit were very strong, but at this moment they were prostrated in the very dust, and her will was weaker than a child's.

In one moment it was revealed to her how immeasurably she loved her brother; how, beside her love for him, all other feelings became weak and of poor account. A blind, unreasoning remorse seized her for not having yielded to his condition, even had it been ten times more shameful than it was; a mad wish that she had done anything, anything, or left undone anything, and stayed with him—with the only being for whom she had any spark of love. At that moment she did not even love Thorgerd; she pitied her in a parenthesis, for she too loved Wilfrid, or had loved him: very likely this stroke would kill her love completely, for it was a thing of yesterday, born of attention

and kindness from him. It would no doubt perish when its owner found it was wrong to indulge it, sneered Katharine, all in this parenthetic way, but her love—his sister's love (and here the storm of love and grief swept completely away every distinction between right and wrong, justice and injustice, reason and unreason)—her love had grown and taken root in spite of every imaginable obstacle; it was not a feeling nor a passion; it was more than creed or religion—it was *herself*.

Yet she had let him send her away—she had gone away rather than yield to him: what difference would one additional submission have made to her, when she had so often submitted before? But now, he and she were parted, and parted with her consent—parted, not by death; that would have been more tolerable—but in life—a living death. She wished she had let him do his own way without let or hindrance, so that she had only clung to him and

stayed with him. Did his conduct put him outside the pale of most that was decent and human? Well, better to have been outside with him than for her to be within and he without.

In Bürger's ballad the girl says—

‘O mother, mother, what is heaven?
O mother, what is hell?
To be with Wilhelm, that's *my* heaven;
Without him—that's my hell!’

Katharine would have sworn to every reckless word of those lines just then. I seem to hear an echo sounding like, ‘What a wicked, impious woman!’ Who doubts it? But no horrified shakings of the head nor lifting of the eyes on the part of those who are neither wicked nor impious will do away with the fact that there are such natures in this world, and when their moment of supreme suffering comes, the platitudes of orthodoxy, the preachings of propriety, and, in her case at any rate, the ‘consolations of religion,’ have just as much effect upon

that suffering as if you flung a pebble at a mountain, hoping thereby to overthrow it.

Katharine, standing motionless herself, felt her whole spiritual being grasped and mastered by the unruly passion that had possession of her, and experienced at the same time an indescribable sense of guilt and self-detestation.

‘What if he were wrong? I should have kept by him through right and wrong, good and bad, sin and sorrow and infamy, to the very last, to the end of all.’

It was the crowning moment of her life, wherein suffering touched the utmost point of which nature was capable (and hers was one of those natures which have ‘such infinite capacity for suffering — so little for enjoying), and even then strained forth on poised foot, and with outstretched hands, into yet further ‘darkness, and dimness of anguish.’ Nothing felt before, nothing to feel in the future, could ever approach it in the slightest degree.

She had stood as if lifeless till the last point of sensation had been reached, till suffering had effaced every other consciousness, and then, striking her hands together, she exclaimed—

‘Wilfrid! Wilfrid! I have lost you; I have left you! Would to God I had died, and seen the whole world dead first!’

Thorgerd was at last roused; she suddenly knew that whatever her sufferings, these were incomparably greater; and one glance at Katharine’s face stirred her effectually, for she feared for her reason.

At first the idea of offering any consolation, or even of speaking at all, to one in such case, seemed not merely hopeless, but absurd. Yet it must be done.

Thorgerd went to her friend, and said—

‘Katharine, you talk as if the end of the world had come. To-morrow something may be done; we are not dead yet, and he is not lost.’

The sister shook her head incredulously, but Thorgerd's words had done their mission. Katharine no longer had every faculty concentrated upon one horrible idea ; her mind was distracted from the absorbing woe ; and Thorgerd, encouraged a little, gave herself up to an attempt at soothing the wilder, stronger, more reckless nature of her companion in grief.

So the weary night passed over. In the morning Thorgerd dressed and went downstairs, partly because she could not sleep, partly because a feeling of pride, shame, and diffidence bade her show as little as possible how much she had suffered, and was suffering, on Wilfrid Healey's account.

Katharine had not slept till morning, and Thorgerd left her upstairs, wishing her to take what rest she could.

She found Mrs. Kay alone in the breakfast-room.

‘ Good morning,’ said the elder lady ; ‘ Louis has had breakfast and gone out.’

Thorgerd bowed.

‘This is a very terrible business, my dear,’ continued Mrs. Kay.

‘Yes,’ assented Thorgerd, faintly.

‘Did Wilfrid actually tell Katharine to leave his house, or did she go herself, in anger?’

‘He said if she took his—wife’s part, she must leave his house then—instantly.’

‘And she chose instantly.’

‘Almost. But pray do not say anything about it, nor seem to approve of it, for she feels bitter remorse at having done it; she wishes she had remained. She is torturing herself with reproaches. She is quite overcome.’

‘Poor soul! It is hard for her both ways. And what do *you* think of it, my dear? Do you approve of what she has done?’

‘I neither dare approve nor disapprove,’ said Thorgerd, in a low voice.

‘I hope and trust it was only passion on

Wilfrid's part—a passing thing. Louis will soon bring him round. In fact, I do not see how Wilfrid can do without Katharine.'

Thorgerd made no answer, and at that moment Louis came in. He looked quickly round, and asked where Katharine was.

'She has not yet come down,' answered his mother. 'I suppose you will speak to her at once, Louis?'

'Certainly,' he said; and there was no grief, no despondency in his look, but high hope and eager expectation.

And as he answered, Katharine came into the room.

Louis and Thorgerd had sufficient self-command not to betray surprise at her terribly altered and haggard appearance: Thorgerd, because she had witnessed the struggle of the preceding night; Louis, because he never looked startled at any one or any thing. But Mrs. Kay said, 'Good-gracious, child!' and then came to a stop.

Mrs. Kay's mind had been running upon the surface and outside part of the affair—how people would gossip—how she did not know whether Katharine was altogether justified in taking the part she had done in the miserable business—how dreadful a scandal it was that she should have managed to get turned out of doors at night—at a moment's notice. (There are ways and ways of putting things.) She had never for an instant pictured the agony that Katharine had really gone through; and now, when she saw the ravages that this one night of misery had made, when she realised that Thorgerd's words were true, and that there was *la mort dans l'âme* of that woman, she was aghast, and showed it. Katharine had never been handsome, thought Mrs. Kay—she was now absolutely ugly. And—yes, it was a fact—as she advanced into the broad light opposite the window, Mrs. Kay saw more than one streak of grey in her thick brown hair. Per-

haps she had never cared to remark upon them before. Ughtred Earnshaw had noticed them many a time.

For an elderly lady with decidedly mundane views, the sight must indeed have been a distressing one.

Katharine looked round at them all as she came in, and then took Mrs. Kay's offered hand, after which she turned to Louis, saying—

‘I must have a few words, with you, Louis.’

‘I was going to ask the same thing from you. Shall we go to the drawing-room?’

He opened the door for her, and they passed out.

‘I do hope,’ sighed Mrs. Kay after them, ‘that they will come to a clear understanding.’

‘I am sure of it,’ replied Thorgerd, in what was for her a tone of sarcasm.



CHAPTER XVII.

‘Elle etait pour lui, dans la vie, comme dans la mort, l’idéal de toute jeunesse, de toute expression sublime, de toute beauté unique et incomparable.’—GEORGE SAND, *Consuelo*.

‘**Y**OU suffer terribly, Katharine,’ began Louis.

‘That goes as a matter of course,’ she answered, coldly. ‘One does not lose one’s all without suffering; I do not, at any rate.’

‘I hope you have not lost your *all*. Wilfrid will be reconciled with you, I have no manner of doubt. He did not know what he was saying last night. And though I have no wish to be egoistic at such a moment, let me remind you that I and all I have are

yours, and devoted to do you the smallest service.'

'Indeed,' said she frigidly; and Louis felt glad he had taken that early morning walk, for he foresaw the most hand-to-hand struggle that had ever yet fallen to his lot,—the struggle with a woman whom he had deceived.

'May I ask,' said Katharine, 'what could have induced you to practise this long course of deceit towards me? You have told me scores of times that you loved and trusted me. I have a theory as to the meaning of the words; *you* seem to infer from them exactly the opposite meaning to that I do. I have been cheated, hoodwinked, played upon, as if I were a puppet or a child, or indeed an idiot: explain your behaviour—if you can.'

'I can soon satisfy you. You allude to my having concealed my knowledge of Wilfrid's marriage from you?'

'Yes, I do.'

‘I only became possessed of that knowledge accidentally, so that it became a point of honour that I should not disclose it.’

‘Then your honour was not involved when you cheated your future wife and lied to her: you *have* lied to me—I’ll try not to think how often. Your honour was not concerned when you let that poor child, without a word of warning either to her or to me, give her heart to a man who was already married, and who could never return her love; or if he did, could only insult her by the bare name of such a return. Answer me! How did you reconcile that with your *honour*?’

Alas, poor Louis! He might have said with Launcelot, that

‘His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.’

‘Katharine, if you knew all—if you knew how I came to learn about Wilfrid’s marriage——’

Fixing her eyes upon him, she said with conviction—

‘Wilfrid told you of it when he was not sober.’

Louis’ silence confirmed her assertion.

‘Before or after he was married?’

‘After.’

‘But you knew before what he meant to do. You knew he went to Haythorpe, and that Sara was going there too.’

‘He did not go with the distinct intention of marrying her. When he heard from me of those two strikes, and that they were Crier’s doing chiefly, he determined to destroy *his* chance of happiness once for all——.’

‘You told me three times that you did not know where Wilfrid was,’ said Katharine, in a low, intense voice. ‘You had no reason for concealment *then*. It was your duty to tell me what he *did* go to Haythorpe for. I might have saved Sara from life-long wretchedness by preventing her from marrying him, and he would have been free now to marry a woman who would elevate him

in every conceivable sense of the word. Why did not you tell me then ?' she concluded, authoritatively.

Louis' face grew dark.

'I cannot submit to be thus catechised, Katharine. You don't seem to place any great reliance on my word.'

"Any great reliance!" From this time to my life's end I shall never believe a word you say. You have deliberately and of your own choice destroyed every grain of my belief in you. It is utterly dead. There is none left ; none at all.'

She had begun the sentence with passion and vehemence, but ere she came to the end of it there rose up in her mind the remembrance of past days—when she was grateful to Louis, when she believed he loved her truly, honestly. *Could* it be that he had cheated her all this time? Why, he must have been cheating her since before Wilfrid left home for Haythorpe! It was too sad,

too pitiable. These reflections took the sting of anger from her tone, and she finished in an accent of sad and broken, but unmistakably mingled pity and scorn.

He heard in her voice that she wondered at him and pitied him. Those who pity, look from high above down to those who are pitied. To Louis, pity from Katharine meant the most cruel stab that his moral nature could receive.

‘It is hard to have it to say,’ went on Katharine, in these softer but most wounding tones, and with streaming eyes; ‘but, oh, Louis, you have left me nothing else! If you had only told me at first, as soon as you knew anything, instead of letting it go on, all this, every atom of this, might have been saved.’

There was silence. When they thought first of what might have been, and then of what was, they felt indeed that it was useless to say ‘Woe! woe!’ for they had woe in their hearts.

‘Why did you not tell me?’ persisted Katharine, through her tears.

‘Because I loved you,” he replied, almost angrily. ‘If I had told you, you would have done all in your power to prevent it. If you had crossed *his* will, do you suppose he would have let you think of me? Good God! I knew what you lived for. My only chance of you was to keep silence; and I kept it.’

‘If you had told me, I should have loved you,’ said Katharine. ‘And you must have known that for him to get into any kind of connection with Sara meant misery for them both, and that it *must* have come out, sooner or later.’

Louis did not say what he thought—that for Wilfrid and Sara, their happiness or their misery, he cared not one straw, but that to win Katharine for his wife was the purpose of his life.

‘I don’t know which of you has sinned the most,’ said she at last; ‘but I know you might

'have prevented it ; and you have cheated me—cheated me !'

There was a ring of almost unendurable pain in her voice.

'*Oh, Katharine!*' he cried, maddened by her words. She could see so clearly. Why had she such clear sight ? Those eyes of hers went through and through every sophism—every turn and winding of the armies of words under which he had to himself sought to justify his deed. They arrived at the naked truth, and then he was forced to behold it with her eyes, and see how hideous a thing it was. He had loved that mental and moral clear-sightedness erstwhile ; but now that it was brought to bear upon his own sin he felt it unbearable, and almost hated it.

But in his humiliation, and her so dreadfully-changed position to him, she was to him more beautiful, more desirable than ever. Yes ; she was, and ever would be for him, and for one other man, 'In death as in life, the ideal of

eternal youth—of every sublime image; the one incomparable beauty.'

'You are right,' he said at last; 'but, Katharine, few, especially few men, look at these things with your eyes: until now, I never saw that I was particularly to blame——'

'I daresay a professional thief does not feel much that he is to blame when he goes to his daily work.'

'But——,' and here he took her hand, which she, never dreaming of what was coming, suffered him to retain—'my darling, my whole life shall atone for it; and, if you will, shall be one long repentance. When I have your pure eyes to see my way for me, and your steady hand to point it out, I can hardly go wrong again.'

She started, and snatched away her hand, horrified to find what he was thinking of.

'What insanity is that?' she asked sternly. 'Surely you do not suppose that after this I would for one moment tolerate the idea of

belonging to you! No. When we part this morning, Louis, we part for ever, so far as that is concerned.'

For an instant his heart stopped in its quickened beat; his pulses came to a pause, and life itself appeared to stand still for the contemplation of those words; then leaped wildly on again. He came nearer to her, and said, in a voice of concentrated resolve—

'Katharine, having once given yourself to me, you are mine for ever. You dare not deny it; you dare not attempt to escape it; you dare not try to set aside so binding a law! As long as I live I will hold you mine; you *are* mine for time and for eternity—you are mine, and I will keep you.'

'I am not yet married to you, Louis, happily for me, and your wildest ravings cannot make me yours without my own consent. That consent I will *never* give—the sooner you understand that the better.'

'You have given it. You gave it on the

beach at Penfynlas. Once having given it, you shall not withdraw it. You have promised, Katharine, and—I think you were just now making some remarks to me about *honour*.'

'I should indeed be' lost to honour if I listened to a single word upon that topic. I do withdraw my consent. Nothing on earth would induce me to fulfil it. Rather than be your wife I would starve myself to death.'

'Spare your protestations, Kate; mine you are, and no other shall ever have you.'

'That is quite beside the question. I am *not* yours, and never will be. I have repeated my resolve in several forms already. How much oftener am I to go through it? Tell me, and I'll get it over, for I am in no humour for burlesque this morning.'

'Nor I,' said he, between his teeth. He spoke rather excitedly, for before her immovable calm and look of patient unalterable resolve, he was losing his self-command.

'You' said,' he went on, suddenly changing

his tactics, 'that I have influence with Wilfrid. It is true; I have more influence over him than you suppose. Katharine, I can use that influence in more ways than one.'

'I fear neither you nor your influence; and as Wilfrid has cast me out, it cannot be anything to me what becomes of him,' she answered, facing him, but with a visage from which every trace of colour had fled. She could be hurt through Wilfrid yet. She said not, but her face gave her lips the lie.

'Wilfrid will no doubt be glad to see me, as he is alone,' observed Louis, quietly.

'No doubt, and every hour I'll pray that he may not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil.'

'You must have taken to praying quite lately,' he sneered; and then, with a sudden change to passionate tenderness, tried—it was as the *dernier effort* of a dying man—to move her.

'Katharine, one word, and this very night

Wilfrid shall take you in his arms and kiss you, and ask you to stay with him; and I'll ask nothing better than to wait as many years as you please—in silence if you like—only say, "I'll be your wife *some time*."

'And in the meantime Wilfrid's wife is scorned and put in the wrong, and left outside in the cold; and my friend, who would never have had all this trouble if she had not met me, is left to suffer and recover as best she may. Your ideas of honour and honesty still shine as brightly as ever, I perceive.'

'You'll make me dangerous,' said he, looking so at the moment. 'In two words, Katharine, will you have me as friend or enemy? Will you, by a word, accept the life and the love I lay at your feet, or shall I have my revenge upon you through *him*? for, mark me, I'll not put up with such a wrong without revenge. It shall be peace or war between us.'

'Take your *revenge*!' cried she, tauntingly.

‘Pray go and consult with Crier upon it. You are a well-matched pair ; gentlemen, both of you—honest, honourable, loyal, and true ! You ought to have hunted in couples all through the chapter, for your actions are exactly on a par. First you cheat and insnare the people who trust in you ; and then, when you are found out and cast off, *revenge* yourselves upon a woman ! Who would not be a woman, and chance having the priceless treasure of such a love as yours ? It’s worth while to be born and to suffer—a woman—if only to prove how good men can love. How shall I ever thank you for teaching *me* ? To give you any hope now would be no less than a sin, for then no one could ever know how sublimely you rise above every earthly baseness and meanness. Go, sir, and take your revenge—your coward is always anxious for revenge. May it be meat and drink and pleasure to you ! May it walk by your side through life, and hold your hand on your

death-bed! With revenge for your companion, you can want neither wife, child, nor friend. The bare idea is ludicrous.'

She had at last been brought to bay; scorn, hatred, and contempt, with fear lurking in the background, had hurried the words from her lips: she was scarcely conscious of what she said. The impulse to turn upon him, to taunt him, to lash him with every stinging word of scorn she could summon to her aid, had prevailed over all prudence and caution.

At last she stopped—her white lips closed. Louis realized that Katharine in a passion was a thing to fear.

Each word had gone home. He felt as base, and baser a hundred times than she had pictured him. Each sentence as it left her lips seemed to burn itself upon his brain. He stood still for an instant, cowed and browbeaten; then saying—'You are mad, you must be mad!' he left the room.

No sooner had he gone than she, repenting of every word she had said, and trembling for Wilfrid, sank down, nerveless and unstrung, upon a couch, and there sat in silent wretchedness, shivering now and then, until Mrs. Kay's entrance roused her to the remembrance that much had to be done that day—a shelter even to be found for Thorgerd and herself: she felt that she could not now remain another hour at Stanlaw.

‘Where’s Louis?’ demanded his mother.

‘I do not know.’

‘You and he have not been quarrelling, I hope?’

‘You might call it quarrelling, I daresay. We have been parting.’

‘Then, Katharine, you are à fool. I must say it if you were dying. The only chance of putting yourself right with the world was that you should marry Louis directly—no one would have dared to utter a whisper against you then. The only chance, and

you have refused it. Your trouble must have turned your brain.'

'The world and I have parted for ever, thanks. I never had much to do with it, and the little I ever saw of it I detested. From this time the worse the world thinks of me, the better pleased I shall be.'

'You are mad.'

'So Louis said. He left me after telling me candidly, twice over, that I was mad.'

'Why, in heaven's name, did you refuse him?'

At that Katharine's pale face darkened again.

'You are his mother, and I would spare you if I could. But since you *will* know, I refused him because he is dishonourable. I could live without *love*, for I have never known what it is; but even I, mean though I am, will not knowingly tie myself to a—sneak.'

'Take care, take care!' cried the other.

'I can make allowances for temper and suffering, but you may go too far.'

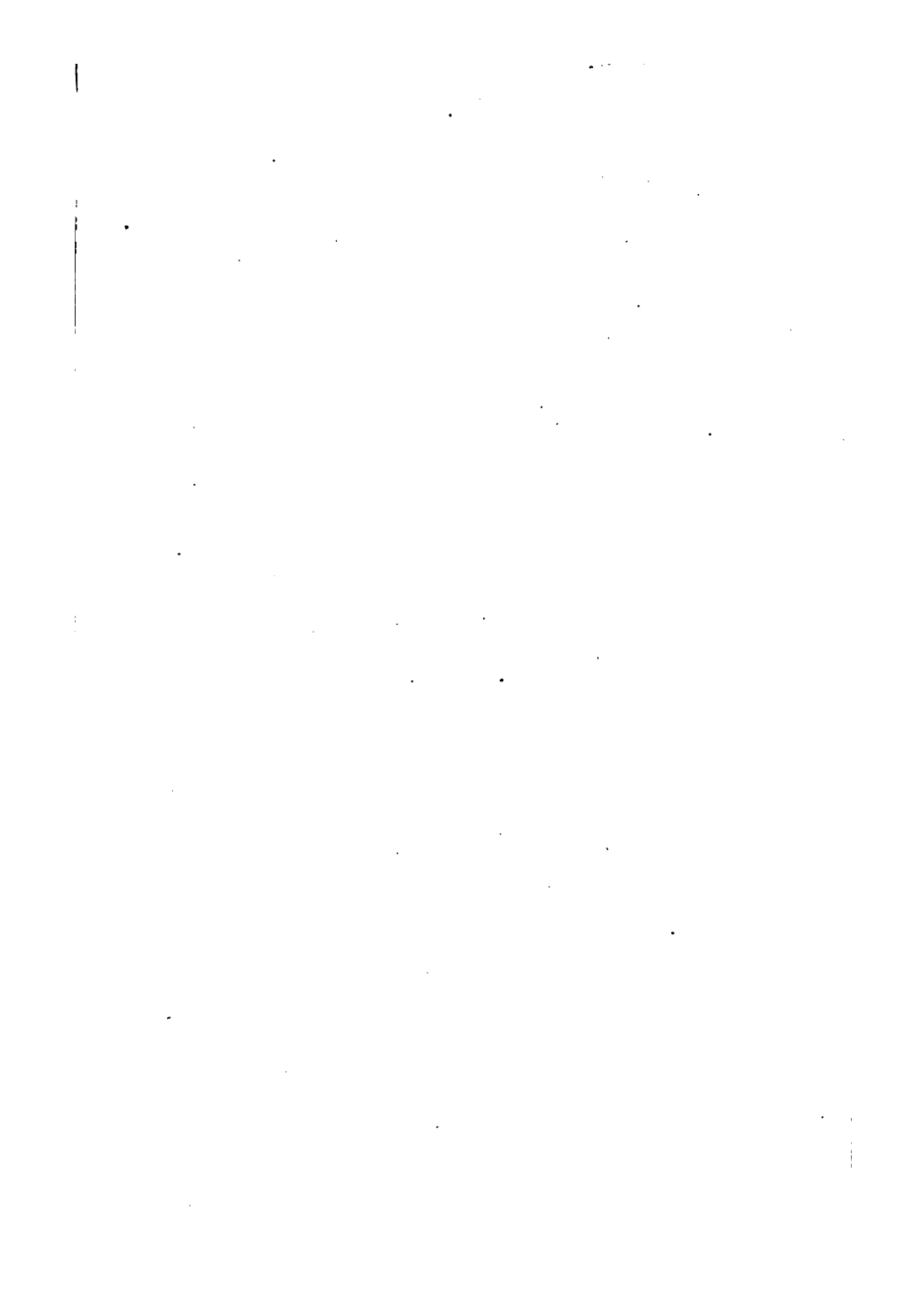
'You asked my reason, and I have given

it you. After this, Mrs Kay, my friend and I must leave you. You could not offer, and we could not accept, any further protection from you. I don't know whether there is a lodging in Hamerton, but if so we must go to it.'

In the course of half an hour they had left Stanlaw, and knew not whither or to whom to go.

Katharine had a vague idea that Mrs. Holden might know of some place where they could be taken in; and she reminded herself too, with a painful unwillingness, that she must see Sara. They therefore directed their steps to Mrs. Holden's.

END OF VOL. II.



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased by 1.5 million (1990–1999) and is projected to increase by a further 1.5 million by 2010 (Office for National Statistics 2000).

There is a growing awareness of the need to develop strategies to meet the needs of the ageing population. The Department of Health (2000) has identified the need to develop a 'new paradigm' of care for the ageing population, one that is based on the concept of 'active ageing'. This paradigm is based on the idea that older people should be able to live independently, actively and healthily, and that they should be able to contribute to society.

The Department of Health (2000) has identified a number of key areas for action in order to achieve this paradigm. These include: (1) promoting healthy living; (2) preventing illness and disability; (3) providing care and support; (4) promoting social participation; and (5) promoting the role of older people in society.

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